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THE

WORKS

Of the Moſt Reverend

Dr. *JOHN SHARP*,

LATE

Lord Archbiſhop of *YORK*.

VOL. III. CONTAINING

SIXTEEN

Caſuiſtical SERMONS

PREACHED ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

The FIFTH EDITION.

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SERMON I.

Of Truſt in God.

PSALM XLII. 6, 7.

According to the Tranſlation of our Liturgy.

Why art thou ſo full of heavineſs, O my ſoul? and why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt in God, for I will yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance.

DAVID, though a man after God's own heart, and dearly beloved by him, was as much exerciſed all his life with troubles and afflictions of ſeveral kinds, as almoſt any we read of. When he compoſed this pſalm, and that which followeth it, it ſufficiently appears, that he was under great perplexity and conſternation of mind, which makes him three times ſpeak to himſelf, *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? And why art thou diſquieted within me?*

What the particular occaſion was, is not expreſſed in the pſalm: But it is generally believed, and it is very probably, that it was upon the rebellion of his ſon Abſalom; by occaſion of which he was driven from Jeruſalem, and ſo baniſhed from the houſe of God in mount Sion, where he had lately fix'd the ark: And this baniſhment of his is that which he is here ſo much concerned for, and ſo paſſionately bewails. Taking this key, we are eaſily let into the ſenſe of both theſe pſalms: The former of which, ſo far as is needful for the right underſtanding this text, I ſhall give you a brief account of.

Thus he begins: As the hunted deer panteth after the brooks of water, ſo panteth my ſoul after thee, O God: My ſoul thirſteth for God, yea, even for the living God: When ſhall I come and appear before God? that is, when ſhall I be ſo happy as to have acceſs again to thy tabernacle, where thou doſt manifeſt thy preſence, and from whence I am now driven by them that ſeek my life? And then he goes on in the third verſe, *My tears have been my meat day and night; while they daily ſay unto me, where is now thy God?* that is to ſay, I am wholly given over to grief and ſorrow, whilſt I hear the continual reproaches of my enemies, ſaying unto me, what is become of thy God, in whom thou was wont to repoſe ſo much confidence? When I remember theſe things (as he goes on in the fourth verſe) *I pour out my ſoul in me: For I had gone with the multitude: I went with them to the houſe of God with the voice of joy and praiſe, with a multitude that kept holy days*; that is, it even breaks my heart to call to mind thoſe happy days, when I brought thine ark to mount Sion, accompanied

nied with the joyful acclamations of all thy people, and to think of all the other bleſſed times, when, before this baniſhment, we met together at thy houſe to worſhip and praiſe thy name. And then follow in the next verſe the words of my text, *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou ſo diſquieted within me?* As if he had ſaid, be not for all this diſcouraged, tho' it be as ſad a calamity as is poſſible, to be thus deprived of the opportunity of worſhipping God in public, yet there is no reaſon thou ſhouldſt be utterly dejected, and abandon thyſelf to deſpair: No, put thy truſt in God; for I ſhall yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance: That is, a time, I hope will come, when I ſhall again go to his houſe, and praiſe him ſtill for his favours towards me, in delivering me from this, as well as my former afflictions.

This is the natural account and meaning of the words, as they lie in the pſalm, and as they were ſpoken by the pſalmiſt. But in the diſcourſe which I deſign upon this text, I mean not to confine myſelf to the particular caſe, upon occaſion of which theſe words were ſpoken, but to take a larger compaſs, and to treat of trouble of mind in general, as far as it is upon a religious account.

There are a great many good people among us, who are afflicted with that which we call religious melancholy. It is for the ſake of theſe, that I have now pitched upon this text, as thinking it may be very fitly applied to their caſe, tho' their troubles are of a different nature from thoſe that David was here exerciſed with, and ariſe from different cauſes. And that which I propoſe to do, is to conſider the ſeveral things that are moſt apt to diſturb them, and to render their

lives miſerable und uncomfortable, and to give ſuch an account of thoſe things, as that they may be ſatiſfied, that they have all the reaſon in the world, notwithſtanding them, to apply David's words in my text to their own caſe, and to ſay with him, *Why art thou ſo caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Put thy Truſt in God, for I ſhall yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance*; or, as he otherwiſe expreſſeth it in the laſt verſe of this pſalm: *For I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God.*

This, I ſay, is what I deſign upon this text; but before I engage in that work, it will not be amiſs, if we a little inſiſt on theſe words with reference to the particular occaſion upon which they were ſpoken; and this ſhall be my buſineſs at this time.

Now the text, thus conſidered, doth afford us two practical obſervations: Firſt, from hence we gather that, to a good man, the being deprived of opportunities of worſhipping God in public, is one of the greateſt afflictions. Secondly, That in this and all other afflictions that befal us, the proper remedy is, to put our truſt in God.

I. I begin with the firſt, That to be deprived of the opportunity of God's public worſhip, is to a good man a moſt grievous affliction.

We ſee how ſadly David here bemoans himſelf upon that account, with what anguiſh he remembers thoſe happy days, when he had free acceſs to the houſe of God, and the holy aſſemblies of his people; and how paſſionately he longs for thoſe days again. He takes no notice of the unnatural rebellion of his ſon Abſalom, which could not but go to the very heart of

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ſo tender a father as he was: He takes no notice of the danger his life was in from the conſpirators; but all that he ſeems concerned about, is, that by theſe means he is baniſhed from God's preſence; that is, from his ſanctuary, from his houſe, from the ſociety of the faithful, where he uſed to praiſe the name of his God, and to partake of his divine influence.

Indeed the happineſs and the bleſſings that good men enjoy in the public exerciſe of their religion, and in the worſhipping God in his houſe, and partaking of his ſacraments, are ſo many and great, that they muſt needs account the being deprived of them a loſs inſupportable. Of all the pleaſures on this ſide heaven, thoſe are the moſt valuable: For indeed they approach neareſt to thoſe in which the ſaints do ſpend their days in their heavenly manſions. What can be more like heaven upon earth, than a company of pious devout ſouls met in one place, having God in the midſt of them, and there partaking of his communications, devoting themſelves to his ſervice, profeſſing their faith and hope in Chriſt, and their dependance upon him, and joining hearts and voices with the heavenly hoſts of angels, in ſinging out the everlaſting praiſes of their Creator and Redeemer; in declaring his wonderful works of love and mercy, and in adoring his infinite wiſdom, and power, and goodneſs, which are conſpicuous to all the world?

O how muſt a devout ſoul be raviſhed with theſe exerciſes! O how dry and inſipid will the higheſt of ſenſual gratifications appear to him, in compariſon of the delicious reliſh that theſe divine employments will leave upon his ſpirit! He that once taſtes the ſweets of theſe, cannot forbear crying out with David in the

84th pſalm, *O how amiable are thy dwellings, thou Lord of hoſts! My ſoul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: My heart and my fleſh crieth out for the living God.* He will even envy the ſparrow, that hath found her an houſe, and the ſwallow, that hath built her a neſt, wherein to lay her young ſo near unto the altar of the Lord, his king, and his God. He will ſay unto God, in the words of the ſame divine pſalmiſt, *Bleſſed are they that dwell in thy houſe; they will be ſtill praiſing thee; for one day in thy courts is better than a thouſand: Nay, I had rather be a doorkeeper in the houſe of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodlineſs.* This muſt needs be the ſenſe of every one that truly loves God, and therefore it may eaſily be imagined, how near it will go to the heart of ſuch a one, to have theſe ſo ineſtimable privileges taken from him.

When the ark of God (which was in thoſe days the ſymbol of his preſence among his people, and from whence he uſed to manifeſt himſelf to them) was taken by the Philiſtines, the loſs of it was ſuch a blow to the good old Eli, that the very news of it killed him: He patiently bore the relation of the death of his two ſons, but when the meſſenger came to mention to him the ark's being carried away, the text tells us, *He fell off from his ſeat backwards, and died*, 1 Sam. iv. 28.

Theſe things being ſo, how ought every one of us to prize and value that free liberty which we of this nation, through the favour of God, enjoy, of reſorting to the houſe of the Lord, and partaking of the means of ſalvation! O how thankful ought we to be for this unſpeakable mercy! How fervently ought we to pray for the continuance of it! And how induſtrious ſhould

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we be, in improving it to good purpoſes, now whilſt God affords it! O how zealouſly ſhould we all be diſpoſed to the ſervice of our God! How diligent in taking all opportunities of attending it! How ſerious and devout while we are in it! How frequent in our approaches to the holy table, which is the moſt ſolemn part of it!

O let us not by our unthankfulneſs to God for the light of his goſpel, and our neglect of, or unprofitableneſs under, thoſe means which he graciouſly diſpenſeth to us, render ourſelves unworthy of them, and give him occaſion to remove our candleſtick from us! Let us remember, that the primitive chriſtians would have bought the privileges we now enjoy at any rate in the world, but could not obtain them. Many prophets and righteous men, as our Saviour ſaid in another caſe, deſired to ſee the things that we ſee, and could not ſee them. But if we make light of them, a time may come, when they may be hid from our eyes alſo; a time may come, when the kingdom of God ſhall be taken from us, and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruit of it, as our Saviour ſpeaks, Matthew xxi. 43.

Secondly, From hence we may ſee how much two ſorts of perſons among us are to be reproved.

Firſt, Thoſe who tho' they do indeed frequent God's houſe, and his public worſhip, yet do not find that ſweetneſs, and pleaſure, and ſatisfaction, in ſo doing, as to be in a capacity of looking upon it as ſo great and invaluable a bleſſing, as the pſalmiſt doth here account it: Tho' they join with the congregation in the prayers of the church, yet their hearts are not touched with that lively and grateful ſenſe of God in

theſe exerciſes, as to render them truly delightful. On the contrary, they are heavy and liſtleſs in theſe offices; their thoughts are employ'd about quite different objects than what they ſhould be; they ſerve God with mere lip-labour, nay, and too many, it is to be feared, do not ſerve him at all, but come thither either for faſhion's ſake, or to gratify their curioſity, or ſometimes, perhaps, out of worſe ends. Oh! If we did truly love God, and make it our buſineſs ſeriouſly to recommend ourſelves to his favour, I am ſure we ſhould look upon his public worſhip as the very joy of our hearts, and long for all opportunities of being preſent at it. And when we were ſo, we ſhould mind it wholly; and every day ſo employed we ſhould account a good day to our ſouls. It is not of hearing ſermons that I now ſpeak; tho' by ſome, the whole, in a manner, of God's ſervice is placed in that. No, tho' it cannot be denied but that that is an exerciſe very profitable, nay, neceſſary to a great many people, who perhaps would know nothing of religion, unleſs they heard ſomething of it in ſermons; yet it is public prayer and thankſgiving, and commemorating the death of our Saviour, and offering up ourſelves as holy and acceptable ſacrifices to him that died for us; it is in theſe things that the life of the chriſtian's worſhip doth conſiſt, and from which the true pleaſure doth ariſe. And wherever theſe things are neglected, or coldly performed, it is a great argument there is but little devotion in the heart.

But, ſecondly, How much to be reproved are they, that when churches are opened, and ſolemn times ſet apart for chriſtians to appear before God, and pay their homage to him, yet ſeldom or never afford their preſence

ſence there; but live in an habitual neglect, if not contempt, of the public duties of religion! Where is the religion of ſuch perſons? What ſenſe can they pretend to have of God? Or what concernment of their own ſouls? That which the pious king of Iſrael thought to be his greateſt affliction, namely, the not being preſent at the public ſervice of God, theſe men make their choice, and their privilege. That which the firſt chriſtians took to be the greateſt puniſhment that could be inflicted, namely, to be excommunicated and debarred from joining together with their brethren in the worſhip of Chriſt Jeſus, theſe perſons inflict upon themſelves; cutting themſelves off from all the benefits of chriſtianity, by a voluntary excommunication from the ſacred aſſemblies.

II. But I proceed to the ſecond general point obſervable from this text, and that is this; That to put our truſt in God, is the proper means to keep our ſouls from being caſt down or diſquieted under any affliction.

This is that which David found a ſovereign remedy in all the diſtreſſes that he fell into. And therefore no wonder that in this preſent diſtreſs of his baniſhment from the houſe of God, he calls upon himſelf to make uſe of it: *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt in God, for I ſhall yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance; I ſhall give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.*

Now an intire truſt and dependance upon God, is an effectual remedy againſt the evil of afflictions in theſe three reſpects:

Firſt, As it is a means of ſupporting them with eaſe and patience.

Secondly, As it is an evidence for ourſelves, that we do that which we know is highly acceptable to God.

Thirdly, As it is the beſt way to obtain deliverance from the afflictions we are under.

Firſt of all, To put our whole truſt in God, and to depend upon him in all things, is the beſt courſe we can take to be at eaſe and peace within ourſelves, howſoever things go. For it takes away all the ſolicitude that is upon us, how to get rid of the preſent evils, and prevent the fear of thoſe that are to come. And it ſtrangely bears up the ſoul under the pain and anguiſh of the moſt grievous ſufferings; and makes them at leaſt ſupportable to us. A man that firmly confides in God, will always be in a tolerable happy condition, under the worſt things that can befal him; but in moſt of the common afflictions of his life, that render other men very miſerable, he will be very chearful and well pleaſed. And the reaſon is, becauſe to truſt and depend upon God, implies a firm belief, not only of the goodneſs of God's providence in general, but alſo of his love and care of us in particular. Now whoſoever is heartily perſuaded of that, and doth withal ſeriouſly attend to it, how can he be but well contented in all the circumſtances of this life? For to conſider, that, however to profane and atheiſtical men all events ſeem to happen by chance, or to owe their production to the blind and neceſſary agency of natural things, yet in truth, there is an infinite wiſdom and foreſight that ſteers and governs the great engine of the world, managing and ordering the motions of the ſeve-

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ral parts, ſo as to contribute to the welfare and preſervation of the whole; and to conſider that this providence is not only confined to generals, but extends itſelf even to every thing and perſon in the whole creation; ſo that a ſparrow doth not fall to the ground without the will of our Father, and the very hairs of our heads are numbered: No condition we are in, no accident that doth befal us, but is brought to paſs by the counſel and approbation of the Governor of the world: And to conſider farther, that the meaſure of this government and providence is not arbitrary will, but infinite and perfect goodneſs: That God doth not diſpenſe any event unto us out of mere humour, (as many of us deal with our fellow-creatures) much leſs becauſe he bears any ill-will to us, but becauſe he clearly ſees it is good for us, or for the world, ours, or the public neceſſities call for it. So that we are always abſolutely certain, that things are carried on by the beſt way that it is poſſible for them to be, and if they were otherwiſe than they are, it would not be ſo well. I ſay, for a good man ſeriouſly to believe and conſider this, how can he be much uneaſy or diſcontented at any accident that befalls him, though it may perhaps be very troubleſome to the ſenſible nature? For he knows that he is in thoſe circumſtances that God ſees fitteſt for him; that is, he is in the beſt circumſtances, all things conſidered, that he can be in, at that time: He knows, if he had been his own carver, he ſhould have choſen worſe for himſelf: He knows, he has one that takes care of him, that provides for him, and one that underſtands infinitely better than himſelf, what is his true intereſt, and makes moſt for his advantage: And, though he doth not underſtand

derſtand the particular tendencies of things; tho' he doth not ſee at preſent how this or the other thing, that looks untowardly or miſchievouſly, ſhould work either to his own private, or to the public advantage; yet he knows, in the general, that all is well intended, that God can and will bring good out of the greateſt evils, and at laſt all things will prove for the beſt, not only to the world in general, but to him in particular, if he truly loves God.

Theſe things now being all contained or implied in that which we call truſt in God, it muſt needs be an excellent expedient againſt all dejection and diſquiet of mind, let our condition be what it will.

This is the firſt thing. But ſecondly, An intire truſt and confidence in God is a good remedy againſt the evil of afflictions, as it is an evidence to us, that we are qualified for his mercy and favour; ſeeing we do that, which is moſt highly acceptable to him, and doth in a particular manner recommend us to his love.

Truſting in God is at all times both an exerciſe and expreſſion of our religion, and a great evidence to ourſelves of our ſincerity in it: But it is eſpecially ſo, when we are in any evil or difficult circumſtances, then when we are under great temptations and perplexities, then when we are encompaſſed with dangers, and have no proſpect of help or deliverance by human means, which way ſoever we look; then, I ſay, to bear up, and exerciſe faith in God, and to ſupport ourſelves in this evil plight with the confidence of his goodneſs to us, as it is a comfortable argument that our virtue and piety is real, and not only pretended; ſo it is a thing that God doth highly eſteem wherever he ſees it, and will not fail to reward it; and

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this is a conſideration that ſhould mightily excite us to the practice of this duty.

Many ſorrows (ſaith the Pſalmiſt, Pſal. xxxii. 10. *Many ſorrows*) *ſhall be to the wicked*; *but whoſo putteth his truſt in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every ſide.* And again, *The Lord taketh no pleaſure in the ſtrength of an horſe, neither delighteth he in any man's legs.* It is not the buſtle we make to ſave ourſelves by human means, that is acceptable to him: But what then? *Why the Lord's delight is in them that fear him, and in them that put their truſt in his mercy.* To put our truſt in God's mercy, is a thing that is delightful to him, a thing that he taketh eſpecial pleaſure in: And accordingly, bleſſed is he pronounced by the prophet, who truſteth in the Lord, and whoſe hope the Lord is; but, on the contrary, *curſed be the man that maketh fleſh his arm, and whoſe heart departeth from the Lord*, Jer. xvii. v.

Indeed reaſon itſelf would teach us, tho' we had no revelation for it, that this truſt and dependance upon God, that we ſpeak of, muſt needs be a moſt lovely quality, and that which above all things muſt endear us to our Maker; for it is an undeniable proof, that we think worthily of God, and that we have ſuch apprehenſions of him as he would deſire we ſhould have, or as it is fit creatures ſhould have of the moſt perfect being. It ſhews, as I ſaid before, not only that we acknowledge him to be the great diſpoſer of all events, and that all the good things we have, or hope for, come from his bounty; but alſo that we are deeply affected with a ſenſe of his goodneſs; that we are heartily perſuaded that he loves us, and will deny us nothing that is convenient for us. Now thus to think of God, is truly to honour

honour him, and expreſſeth more piety and devotion a great deal, than anxious prayers and ſupplications to him: Thoſe argue love to ourſelves; but this is an evidence that we truly love God.

On the other ſide, to be without this truſt and affiance in God, and to place our hopes and confidence in ſecond cauſes, is certainly a piece of impiety and irreligion, wherever it is found: And therefore is juſtly ſtiled by the prophet, in the forecited place, a departing from God; for it either ſhews, that we have no ſenſe of God upon our minds, nor take any notice of his government of the world; or, if we do, it ſhews that we have mean thoughts of him, and believe either that he cannot or will not ſupply our wants and neceſſities. And even what man is there among ourſelves, that would not take it very ill, to be thus repreſented, or thus thought on, by any child of his that depends upon him?

Thirdly and laſtly: Truſting in God may therefore be recommended, as an effectual remedy in all afflictions, becauſe it is the beſt means to obtain deliverance from them.

It is not in man (ſaith Solomon) *to direct his ſteps:* Walk he never ſo cautiouſly, he cannot ſecure himſelf from falling into a thouſand evils, to which this ſtate of mortality is daily expoſed: And, when he is in them, he cannot, by all the wit he has, or all the induſtry he can uſe, get himſelf clear again: He may make a ſtir, and be reſtleſs and impatient, but he gets no other good many times by his ſtruggling, than what wild beaſts do that are caught in a ſnare, namely, the farther entangling themſelves: He may diligently apply himſelf to this or the other mean for comfort

comfort or redreſs, but he will too often find his endeavours ineffectual: When he has done all he can, God is the governor of the world, and diſpenſeth good and evil to the ſons of men, when, and to whom, and ſo long as he pleaſeth; and, therefore, from him only can we expect eaſe or deliverance from thoſe things that oppreſs us; and the general way that he hath appointed for this end, is, patiently to wait upon him, and to truſt in his mercy; ſo will he in due time ſhew himſelf our Saviour and deliverer.

We ſpeak not this to diſcourage the uſe of any lawful means, either for the preventing or removing our evil circumſtances: On the contrary, it is by them, that God ordinarily worketh his deliverances, both for his people in general, and for every ſervant of his in particular; and therefore they are not to be neglected. But this we ſay, without the bleſſing of God no means will be effectual, and if we have his bleſſing, we ſhall not fail of redemption from all our troubles, of what nature ſoever they be, when he ſees fit; tho' there appear no viſible means at preſent, or, tho' thoſe that do appear, ſeem never ſo unlikely or inſufficient. And farther, the proper way to obtain this bleſſing of his, is intirely to depend upon him, to confide in his goodneſs, to be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and ſupplication with thankſgiving to make our requeſts known unto him.

This the holy pſalmiſt did continually experience all his life long, and this he declares and recommends as a ſtanding truth, to all ſucceeding generations, in ſo many paſſages of his pſalms, that it would be troubleſome to quote them. *The Lord*, ſaith he, *never faileth them that put their truſt him. Truſt thou in the Lord,*

and be doing good, ſo ſhalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed. Commit thy ways unto the Lord, and put thy truſt in him, and he ſhall bring it to paſs: The ſalvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, who is a preſent help in time of trouble; he ſhall deliver them, he ſhall ſave them, becauſe they put their truſt in him.

The truth is, God very often afflicts good men for this very reaſon, that they may the more truſt in him, that they may ſit looſer from the world, and the enjoyments thereof; that they may ſee the vanity of all earthly things, and exerciſe a more lively faith and dependance upon his providence: which being ſo, it cannot be doubted, but that this is a certain mean to get their afflictions removed; for, take away the cauſe, and the effect ceaſeth. If their not truſting in God was the cauſe of their affliction, then their hearty affiance in him will be the mean to ſet them free from it.

It is true, indeed, the deliverances that God works for his children, are not always ſuch as they deſire or pray for; he is many times not pleaſed to remove his hand, in that inſtance they are apt to wiſh he would; but ſtill we ſay, he doth deliver them. If he doth not anſwer their prayers, and their hopes, in kind; yet if he gives them grace and ſtrength to undergo what he lays upon them, and beſtows other bleſſings upon them, which are more needful for them than thoſe they would have, is not this as great a kindneſs and mercy to them? Certainly it is.

O therefore, whatever the event of things be, whatever fleſh and blood ſuggeſt to us, let us fix this as an immoveable principle in our hearts, that to truſt in God,

God, and chearfully to depend upon him, in a conſtant adherence to our duty, is the moſt effectual courſe we can take, both to ſupport us under all afflictions, and to deliver us from them.

And now what remains, but that every one of us ſhould be ſeriouſly exhorted to put all this in practice, in every ungrateful and diſpleaſing circumſtance of life that we light into, to put our truſt in God as the help of our countenance, and our God? We ſhould, without doubt, ſpeedily find the eaſe and comfort of ſo doing; let our afflictions be of what nature they will, this is an antidote that will reach them. Are we troubled about our private concernments in this world? Do not our deſigns or endeavours ſucceed as we expected? or are we in a poor low condition, and hard put to it to live? or are our deareſt relations taken from us? or do we groan under the bondage of harſh parents, or cruel maſters, or under the miſery of having wicked and undutiful children? Why, in all theſe caſes let us ſay to our ſouls, as David here in the text did, *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt in God.* And if we do thus, we ſhall aſſuredly be in a condition to give him thanks, he will ſhew himſelf the help of our countenance, and our God; we ſhall give him thanks either for the ſupporting us under our afflictions, or freeing us from them; he will be our God, either by conferring thoſe bleſſings we deſire, or by giving us others that are fitter for our condition.

Are we concerned for any danger that we apprehend may threaten the public? Why ſtill let us ſay to ourſelves, *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt yet in God.*

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He is the ſame God, that hath hitherto taken care of his people, and he will, without doubt, continue ſo to do, in ſuch ways, and by ſuch means, as he ſees moſt convenient for them. He ſits at the helm, and ſees how all things go, and will interpoſe when it is fit he ſhould, either in preventing the things we fear, or in ſo ordering matters, that all things, whatever happens, ſhall work together for good unto his church. O therefore, why ſhould we be afraid of any evil tidings? Let our hearts ſtand faſt, and believe in the Lord.

Laſtly, Are we exerciſed with any trouble of mind about our ſpiritual affairs? Doth God write bitter things againſt us, and make us to poſſeſs the iniquities of our youth? Doth he hide away his face from us, and ſhut up his loving kindneſs in diſpleaſure? Why here again let us ſay to ourſelves, *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt in God.* Wait upon him with faith and patience, and thou ſhalt ſee all theſe ſtorms will blow over. Theſe chaſtiſements, with which thou art exerciſed, when they have brought forth the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs, will turn to thy exceeding joy and comfort, and thou ſhalt again more affectionately than ever give thanks to him, who is the help of thy countenance, and thy God.

O, my brethren, that all of us were acted by ſuch a ſpirit as this! O that we would endeavour, in all conditions and circumſtances of life, thus firmly to hope in God, and put our confidence in his mercy; not diſquieting ourſelves with the preſent events, nor being ſolicitous about the future, but caſting the whole burden of both upon the Lord, who careth for us,

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looking up to him in every diſpenſation of providence, and aſſuredly believing that all ſhall at the laſt be for the beſt to us!

This, one would think, ſhould be one of the eaſieſt duties in the world to any one that believes a God and a providence; but yet we find, alas! moſt of thoſe who pretend to believe both, to be very difficultly brought to it. We talk of God, as if we thought him to be the governor of the world, and the diſpenſer of all events, both good and bad, that happen to mankind: But yet, alas! how few of us are there that dare repoſe any confidence in him! Our care, and trouble, and ſolicitude about our affairs, is as great, as if all things came to paſs by chance, or fate, or the will of man: Our fears and our hopes do altogether depend upon ſecond cauſes. We are indeed apt enough to truſt God with our ſouls, not caring how little thought we take about them; but, as for our worldly concernments, we will not truſt him any farther, than as we ſee we have the means of accompliſhing our deſigns in our own hands. But this is a baſe, unthankful, unworthy practice: For ſhame let us quit it; let us ſhake off this dull, earthly, ſtupid humour; let us caſt our eyes up to the author and preſerver of our beings, and, like men, make uſe of the reaſon and underſtanding that he hath gvien us, not living altogether by ſenſe, as the brute beaſts do, but exerciſing faith in the goodneſs and power of God. By this mean we ſhall beſt approve ourſelves to him, and moſt conſult our own intereſts: By this mean we ſhall obtain of him to be our Saviour and mighty deliverer in all dangers, and ſhall for ever have

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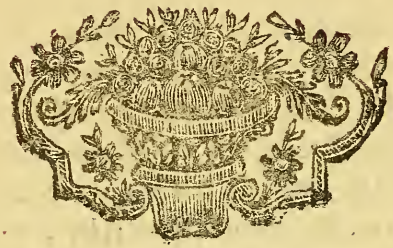
cauſe to give him thanks, who is the help of our countenance, and our God.

We humbly beſeech thee, O Father Almighty, to look upon our infirmities, and for the glory of thy name, &c.



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SERMON II.

About religious Melancholy and Desertion.

PSALM XLII. 6, 7.

According to the Translation of our Liturgy.

Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy trust in God, for I will yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance.

HAVING, the last time, given you an account of the occasion and scope of these words, as they were spoken by the psalmist, and treated of such practical points, as may be deduced from them, as so considered; I now come to that which I chiefly designed, when I pitched upon this text, which was, as I told you, to speak to the case of those among us, that are troubled with religious melancholy.

And here, that which I propose to do, is, to consider the several things that are most apt to disturb them, and which are wont to create great uneasiness,

and trouble, and perplexity to their minds, and to give ſuch an account of theſe things, as that every good man may be ſatisfied, that there is no reaſon that, for the ſake of them, his ſoul ſhould be caſt down, or his ſpirit diſquieted within him; but, on the contrary, that he ought to praiſe God, and to look upon him as the help of his countenance, and his God, as David expreſſeth it in this pſalm.

But before I engage in this argument, it is fit I ſhould give you a more particular account of what I mean by religious melancholy, and how it is diſtinguiſhed from other ſorts of trouble of mind, that are incident to mankind.

Firſt of all, There is a melancholy and dejection of ſpirit occaſioned by worldly things, ſuch as ſickneſs, or poverty, or diſtreſs, or loſs of friends, or bad children and relations, or ſome other outward croſs or diſappointment, which either is come upon us, or we fear will do. But now this is not that trouble of mind I am here concerned with, tho' it be the moſt common trouble that exerciſeth the minds of men.

Secondly, There is a trouble of mind upon a religious account, which moſt men, both good and bad, have ſometimes experience of, which likewiſe is far different from that religious melancholy I am here to ſpeak of. There is no good man that at any time falls into a ſin, or doth any action that he believes to be diſpleaſing to God, but he muſt needs be troubled in conſcience for it, and heartily vexed in his own mind, that he ſhould be ſo fooliſh, and ſo ungrateful to his great benefactor. He will truly be ſorry for his fault, and patiently confeſs it, and earneſtly beg pardon for it. But then it is not his infelicity to be thus troubled

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and afflicted (as the case is with them that are religiously melancholy) but it his duty and his advantage: For this is a mean whereby he must be restored to the favour of God, and to his own peace and quiet of mind; and it is the best preservative likewise against his falling again into the same fault. And so for bad men, those that live in any course of vice or wilful sin, there are few of them but are sometimes much troubled in mind, and feel a great load of melancholy upon their spirits, when they reflect upon their spiritual condition: Many occasions are, by the providence of God, thrown in their way, which seldom fail of putting them in mind of their sinful lives, and of the danger they are in upon account thereof. And, if these reflections be serious, they cannot but be accompanied with a great deal of horror and amazement. But, however they stifle these thoughts in the time of their health, yet when they come to be on their sick beds, and expect nothing but death; then many of them are most terribly awaken'd, their consciences then fly in their faces, and in a miserable agony they are, upon account of their former ungodly life, and would give all the world to be rid of those dismal apprehensions they have of themselves, and of their own everlasting condition.

But this trouble likewise is nothing but what is reasonable, and, considering their circumstances, very necessary for them. It is not a melancholy grounded upon a conceit, or imagination, or misapprehension of things; for really they have great reason to be thus disquieted and afflicted in their own minds, and they must be senseless and stupid, if they were not. And it is a mercy of God to them, that they are thus awaken'd;

awaken'd; for, if ever they repent, and come to good, it muſt in all probability be by ſuch beginnings as theſe.

But thirdly, There is another kind of religious trouble of mind, which none but good men, or thoſe that deſire ſo to be, are ſubject to: Which yet is different from that religious melancholy, that is now under my conſideration. That which I mean, is that trouble which ariſes from our irreſolution or doubtfulneſs about the goodneſs or badneſs of actions. When, in any caſe that we happen to be engaged in, we are at a loſs how to determine ourſelves, as fearing that, if we act this way, we ſin; if we act the other way, we may ſin likewiſe. Theſe kind of doubts or ſcruples do often render the minds of well-meaning perſons very uneaſy, even ſometimes in ſuch inſtances as another man, and he an honeſt man too, would find no difficulty at all in. It may indeed, and doth ſometimes happen, that this perplexity and ſcrupuloſity about actions, doth proceed from diſtemper and indiſpoſition of body; and, where it doth ſo, it is a ſpice of that religious melancholy I am here to ſpeak of; but, generally, it proceeds from ignorance of things, and the falſe notions men have taken up about the meaſure of actions, from their education, or converſation, and the like. And, when theſe are once removed, and the man comes to form a right judgment of things, there is an end of the ſcruples or doubts, and conſequently of all that trouble they were the cauſe of.

But fourthly, As for that ſort of trouble of mind, which we properly call religious melancholy, and which is my preſent argument; the beſt account I can give of it is this, That it is a dejection of mind occaſioned from

from the temperament. or moſt commonly from the diſtemperature of the body, accompanied with unreaſonable fears and frights about our ſpiritual condition.

We cannot but have obſerved (at leaſt they muſt that have ever had to do with mens ſouls) that there are a great many perſons who, as far as we can judge, either by their converſation, or by that account they give of themſelves (which they give in ſuch circumſtances too, that no man can ſuſpect that they counterfeit) are very innocent and virtuous perſons, and have a hearty ſenſe of God and religion upon their minds, and would not, for all the world, do any thing that they know to be ſinful: And who conſeqently may, with very good reaſon, be looked upon to be the true diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt, and as ſuch accepted of God. Yet theſe perſons, tho' they have as little reaſon as any to be troubled about their ſpiritual eſtate, and far leſs than moſt of mankind, who live without any ſuch trouble; yet ſuch is their infelicity, that they are often grievouſly dejected, and under ſad fears and perplexities, even to that degree, as ſometimes to think themſelves the moſt miſerable wretches that breathe. So that in truth there is none in mankind can live a more uncomfortable life, than they do: Nay, even at their death, when they ſtand moſt in need of comfort, yet now and then it happens that they cannot rid themſelves of thoſe frightful and diſmal apprehenſions.

If we enquire into the cauſes of theſe their troubles, or how it comes to paſs, that theſe perſons are thus afflicted and diſturbed more than other men, I ſhould be loth to aſſign theſe two, that they themſelves look upon to be the true ones; that is to ſay, either that God has forſaken them, and left them to themſelves,

or that it is the devil, that is always busy about them, and raiseth those tumults and disturbances in their minds.

For as for the first, I doubt not but that these persons are as much under the protection, and care, and guidance of God Almighty, as those that were never thus exercised; and, as for the devil, they neither gave him opportunity, nor is he, I hope, ordinarily permitted to be so busy about them, as they are apt to imagine. No; I take it, that the principal causes, and the foundation of all their troubles, lie in the ill habit of their bodies: Their animal spirits, which the soul makes use of as her instruments in the performance of all her rational operations; these animal spirits, I say, are vitiated and disordered by fumes arising from hypochondriac affections, and that gives the first occasion to the disorder of their minds.

That what I say is true, sufficiently appears from this; namely, that those who are constantly and habitually thus troubled in mind, are known, by a great many symptoms, not only to be persons of a melancholy complexion, but also to be highly under the power of hypochondriacal melancholy; and those that are not frequently under these troubles, but only sometimes, may observe of themselves, that these troubles have usually come upon them, either upon some heavy cross and affliction that has befallen them, or some great sickness, of which they were not well recover'd, or some other natural cause, that hath put their bodies into some weakness or indisposition; and when that has been removed, they have been as well in their minds as they were before. But this is not all, tho' it be true, as I have said, that the seat of this trouble of

of mind is in the body, which is by some occasion or other out of order, yet it is not from hence alone that all the trouble doth proceed; for then all hypochondriacal persons would be thus afflicted: There is something in the mind itself, of which this distemperature of the body doth commonly take advantage for the making all that stir, and disorder, and confusion, that such persons feel in themselves; and this without doubt is some frightful and uncomfortable notions or opinions, which the men have happened to take up in matters of religion, which, upon examination, will be found either to be plain mistakes, or, if they be true, yet the men do miserably misapply them to their own case.

Now, when a melancholy hypochondriacal person, that is by his temper inclined to be serious, and devout, and religious, hath unluckily levened his mind with such false principles, or, through want of skill, makes such misapplication of true ones; it cannot be avoided but when he comes to view himself in such a glass as this, which is of his own framing, and to make a judgment of his own spiritual features, and the condition of his soul therefrom, he must needs do it mightily to his own disadvantage, and consequently create to himself a world of trouble, and disquiet, and anxiety, more than he needs to do.

Admitting now this to be a true account of that which we call religious melancholy, you see there are two things necessary to be done, in order to the cure or removal of it:

First, That the persons afflicted with it do take care of their bodies, that they be put into a better state of health and vigour, and freed from all hypochondriac fumes that do oppress them.

Secondly, That they endeavour to get their minds truly informed about thoſe matters of religion, from which their diſeaſe doth, as I may ſay, take a handle to vex and diſturb them.

To preſcribe rules about the firſt of theſe, belongs to the phyſician, and therefore I ſhall not pretend to meddle therein: But the ſecond thing is a proper ſubject for a divine, and accordingly I ſhall diſcourſe of it, as far as I have been acquainted with caſes of this nature, tho' to ſpeak my thoughts freely, I muſt needs ſay, that in many of theſe caſes the phyſician's part is every whit as neceſſary, if not more, than that of the divine; for, if the bodily indiſpoſition was removed, moſt of the fears, and frights, and diſturbances, that happen upon a religious account, would vaniſh of themſelves: At leaſt, the perſons would be capable of receiving full ſatisfaction about thoſe matters, from the prudent inſtructions and diſcourſes of thoſe whom they conſulted; whereas, while the root of the diſeaſe (I mean that ill ferment of the blood and ſpirits) remains in the body, the moſt comfortable diſcourſes that can be made to them about their ſpiritual condition (tho' to the by-ſtanders, that hear them, they appear never ſo wiſe and rational) will often have but little effect upon them. Or if they do give them ſome eaſe and ſatisfaction for the preſent, yet in a little time their fears and troubles return again, and are as impetuous as they were before.

I know that many of theſe, that are afflicted with this malady, will not eaſily give credit to what I now ſay. A man, for inſtance, that is troubled with horrid blaſphemous thoughts, which is one of the caſes I ſhall hereafter ſpeak to, will think it ſtrange that you ſhould

ſhould adviſe him, for the cure of ſin, to make uſe of phyſic and exerciſe, and ſuch other methods, as are preſcribed to valetudinary perſons, for the recovery of their health: Why, ſaith he, I am well enough in body; I eat, I drink, I ſleep; all my diſeaſe is in my mind: I would be rid of theſe wicked thoughts, that do continually haunt me and torment me, and what can phyſic or exerciſe contribute to that? I have need of a ſpiritual phyſician. Why thus far he is indeed in the right, a ſpiritual phyſician may do him ſome ſervice, and give him ſome comfort by convincing him, (if he be capable of it) that theſe thoughts of his, how wicked and blaſphemous ſoever they are, ſhall do him no harm, ſo long as he doth not conſent to them: that he is never the worſe for them; that they ſhall never come into his account at the day of judgment. But this is all he can do; he cannot, I doubt, put him into a way of getting rid of theſe thoughts, which is the main thing he deſires; for that cannot be done, but by the alteration of the ſtate of his body, from the ill diſpoſition of which all theſe thoughts do ariſe. But now, the man being ignorant of this, and having no notion how his body ſhould thus affect his ſoul, as to the making her think after this or that manner, (which yet it certainly doth) cannot readily entertain any advices that are given to him, with relation to that; tho' yet he will find, upon trial, that it is from hence only that his cure muſt be perfected.

And now, having premiſed this, in order to the ſhewing what ſort of relief the application of theological remedies will afford to perſons in theſe caſes; I come to ſpeak to the caſes themſelves. And theſe indeed are various, as various as are mens tempers, and

the opinions they have taken up about religion. Two of the moſt common ones, namely, thoſe two that I have already given a hint of, I mean to ſpeak to, in this, and the following diſcourſes, that I deſign to make upon this argument; deferring the others to future opportunities, as they come in my way.

The firſt is the caſe of thoſe that are in the ſtate of deſertion, as we commonly call it, that are deprived of all the ſpiritual comforts they uſed to find in their duty, and thereupon think that they are forſaken of God.

The ſecond is the caſe of thoſe that think themſelves given up to the power of the devil, upon account of a multitude of wicked blaſphemous thoughts and fancies which do continually haunt their minds, do what they can to the contrary.

Now, both theſe caſes I ſhall endeavour to give ſuch an account of, that the perſons concerned in them may be ſatisfied, that they may, and ought to apply David's words in my text to themſelves, and to ſay with him, *Why art thou caſt down, O my ſoul? why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt in God; for I ſhall yet give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.*

I begin with the firſt; the caſe of deſertion. Many pious and devout people we have known, that are under terrible apprehenſions that God hath forſaken them, and withdrawn his preſence and aſſiſtance from them, and left them wholly to themſelves.

If we aſk them, what makes them think ſo? Why they tell you, they have loſt all that joy and comfort that uſed to fill their ſouls: They cannot pray, nor give thanks, nor receive the ſacrament, with that devotion

devotion and ſatisfaction they uſed to do; their hearts are altogether dead as to all ſpiritual exerciſe: Whence now, ſay they, can this proceed, but from God's forſaking them, and withdrawing his gracious influence from them, that he was pleaſed formerly to vouchſafe them?

Two things I ſhall do in ſpeaking to this caſe:

Firſt, I ſhall ſhew what it is for God to forſake a man, and that they have no reaſon to believe that they are in that ſtate.

Secondly, I ſhall give an account of the true cauſes from whence theſe effects do proceed, which they attribute to God's forſaking them.

I begin with the firſt. Two notions of God's forſaking men we meet with in the ſcripture. The one with reſpect to their outward circumſtances, and it conſiſts in God's withdrawing his outward bleſſings from them. The other is with reſpect to their ſpiritual condition, and conſiſts in God's withdrawing his inward grace from them.

It is in the firſt of theſe ſenſes, I do verily believe, that David ſo often, in the Pſalms, complains of God's forſaking him; of his hiding his face from him; of his abſenting himſelf, and ſhutting up his loving kindneſs in diſpleaſure; and, if any one will carefully peruſe the Pſalms, where theſe and ſuch-like expreſſions are uſed, and mind upon what occaſion they come in, I dare ſay, they will be convinced, from the ſcope and deſign of the diſcourſe, that David doth not make theſe complaints, with reference to his ſpiritual eſtate, as if God had withdrawn his grace, or the inward influences of the Holy Spirit, from his mind, but wholly with reference to ſome outward calamity, ſome out-

ward diſtreſs, or affliction, or perſecution, that he, or the church of God, was then under: But now this is nothing to the caſe of theſe perſons among us that I am at preſent ſpeaking of; it is not of God's forſaking them in this ſenſe that they complain: Let God exerciſe them with as many outward afflictions and adverſities, as he pleaſeth, they will bear them as well as they can, and they will not murmur or complain upon account thereof; but they are afraid that God has forſaken them, as to their ſpiritual conditions; that he hath withdrawn from them the inward influences of his Holy Spirit, and left them to themſelves.

But now what little grounds they have for ſuch fears as theſe, will ſufficiently appear, from conſidering the nature of this ſecond ſort of deſertion, or God's forſaking man.

It cannot be denied but that God may, and ſometimes doth forſake men, by withdrawing from them the inward aſſiſtance of his grace and Spirit, and this is deſertion properly ſo called; and a heavy judgment it is, upon whomſoever it falls: And this I take to be that which David ſo earneſtly prays againſt, in the 51ſt pſalm, after he had ſo grievouſly provoked God, and wounded his own conſcience, by his foul adultery and murder; *Caſt me not away*, ſaith he, *from thy preſence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.* God, I ſay, may, and, it is to be feared, doth ſometimes forſake men, in this ſenſe: He withdraws from them his grace, both that preventing, and aſſiſting, and even that reſtraining grace, which he had formerly afforded them; and leaves them intirely to themſelves, to be filled with their own ways, and to commit all manner of ſin with greedineſs; and thus, for inſtance, he

forſook

forſook Judas Iſcariot; upon which the devil enter'd into him. And this ſtate is that which the ſcripture expreſſeth by darkneſs of heart; by hardneſs of heart; by being given up to a reprobate mind; by being under the power of ſtrong deluſions, and the like: but then it is to be remember'd,

Deus nunquam deſerit, niſi deſerentem.

As St. Auſtin ſomewhere ſpeaks, that *God never thus forſaketh any man, that hath not long before forſaken him*; God is patient, and long-ſuffering, and is not eaſily provoked thus to give up a man. Long doth he bear with the ingratitude and perverſeneſs of his creatures; and many and various ways doth he uſe to bring them to a ſenſe of their ſin, and of their duty. But if they reſiſt all theſe means; if the goodneſs of God doth not lead them to repentance, but, on the contrary, they deſpiſe the riches of his grace, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, and continue obſtinate in their evil courſes, and ceaſe not to put affronts upon the Holy Spirit of God; a time will come, when this Holy Spirit will no longer ſtay with them, but he will return to his place, and leave them to their own hardneſs of heart, and impenitency, to treaſure up wrath againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

It is true, that every act of wilful ſin, and eſpecially every habit of ſuch ſin, doth highly grieve the Spirit of God. But yet it is not for every ſuch act or habit, that the Spirit doth uſually forſake men. He ſtill continues to knock at the door of their hearts, and to purſue them with his holy motions, ſo long as there

are any hopes of gaining them to repentance: But if men be unperſuadable, and, inſtead of complying with God's grace, and reforming their ways, go on, adding ſin to ſin, and growing more audacious and impudent in their provocations, it is but juſt with God to abandon ſuch ungrateful wretches, and totally to leave them to themſelves.

But it is to be hoped there are but very few, in compariſon, among us, whom God hath thus forſaken. The greateſt part of men, tho' they are far from being as good as they ſhould, (nay, far from being as good as they muſt be, if ever they come to heaven) yet are not thus forſaken. The Spirit doth ſtill ſtrive with them; and, tho' he doth not dwell with them (which he doth in none but holy and ſanctify'd perſons) yet he often affords them his preſence, and offers them his aſſiſtance; he often puts good thoughts into them, and gives them many opportunities of reſcuing themſelves from the ſlavery they are under: If they will make uſe of that aſſiſtance, and comply with thoſe motions, and improve thoſe opportunities as they may do, there is no doubt in the world but they will be gained to virtue and happineſs; God hath not forſaken them, and, conſequently, there is hope of them, till they be hardened in their ſins, as we read Pharaoh was.

If this now be the true notion of ſpiritual deſertion, as, without doubt, it is, we may from hence learn theſe four things, which I ſeriouſly recommend to the conſideration of all thoſe afflicted perſons among us, that I am now concerned with; and I conclude with them:

First

First of all, That they, of all others, have the least reason to imagine that they are forsaken of God; for they, of all others, are fartheſt from that state which I have now represented as the true state of spiritual desertion: Their hearts are so far from being obstinately bent to the pursuit of any evil course, that they abhor nothing more than the thoughts of it. They have a most tender sense of their duty, would not for the world willingly do any thing that they know is displeasing to God; all their grief and trouble is, that they do not please him enough, that they do not perform that chearful, uniform obedience to his holy laws, that they desire to do. Doth this now look like the case of one that is abandoned of God, and left to himself? The effects of God's forsaking men are, hardness of heart, and impenitence, and running on in a course of known wickedness without any reluctance or remorse. No man that is ever apprehensive of God's forsaking him, that is ever fearful that he should, or troubled that he hath; no such man, I say, is really forsaken by him. Those that are the least sensible of such a judgment, are the likeliest to have it inflicted upon them.

Secondly, Those persons, whose cases we are representing, as they are not at present forsaken by God, so neither are they in danger of it: For, whatever apprehensions they may have of themselves, they do not give God occasion to forsake them, because they do not forsake him. For, I suppose, tho' they complain of great dulness and insensibility, and can by no means satisfy themselves in their religious endeavours and performances, yet they have really as rooted an aversion to every thing that is evil, and have as hearty a desire,

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and as ſteady reſolutions, and uſe as ſerious care to frame their life and converſation according to the laws of God, as ever they had, or did. Now, ſo long as they continue in this frame and diſpoſition of mind, aſſuredly God is as much preſent with them by his grace, and Holy Spirit, (tho' they do not feel it ſo much) as ever he was. They partake as much of his influence and communications, and do really as much enjoy his favour, and the light of his countenance, in the true ſenſe of it, as ever they did: And, however, cloudy and liſtleſs their minds be; however flat and dry in their devotions; how little joy and comfort ſoever they find in their lives; they are certainly as dear to God, (who knoweth their make, and diſtinguiſheth between the ſteady principles of their minds, and the uncertain tempers of their bodies, which affect them; I ſay, they have as much the favour and acceptance of God) as when they thought themſelves in the moſt happy condition: Nay, and they will continue ſo to have, as long as they continue their care and diligence in ſerving him, and obeying his laws.

But thirdly, When once they begin to grow careleſs in their lives, when their good purpoſes and reſolutions flag and grow cold, and their devotions are ſeldomer, and their relapſes into ſin more frequent, and more grievous, then let them have a care of themſelves, for theſe are evil ſymptoms of a dangerous fall approaching: They now begin to grieve the Holy Spirit, and to provoke him to withdraw himſelf: And, if they do not, by repentance, recover themſelves to their former healthful conſtitution of ſoul, that Holy Spirit will, by degrees, withdraw himſelf. For, in the ſame degree that they forſake their duty, will the Holy Spirit

Spirit forsake them; as sin grows stronger in them, so doth the Spirit grow weaker: So that, if they go on in this falling, declining condition, they will at last lose the in-dwelling of the Spirit, and be reduced to the state of sensual carnal men. It doth therefore infinitely concern all those that are at present in a good condition, to keep up their holy purposes and resolutions as much as they can; at no time to slacken their diligence in the service of God, how drily and unsatisfactorily soever they perform it: If their hearts be sincere, and they do really make it their business to live as well as they can, no matter what they think of themselves, no matter what inequality of temper, what ebbs and flows of affections, they are subject to, all is still right with them: But when they begin to grow negligent and careless in their endeavours, and to indulge themselves in any vain or sinful course, then begins their danger.

But then, fourthly and lastly, to conclude this point: If it should be the unhappiness of these persons, by their own carelessness, to lose the inhabiting presence of the Holy Spirit, which was the principle of regeneration, and the new life in them, so that they are now brought back again to the state of worldly, sensual men; yet, as it appears from what has been said, it is not even yet to be concluded, that they are forsaken of God, or in a state of desertion truly so call'd; for tho' the Spirit doth not now any longer dwell with them, but has quitted their souls from being his temple, his habitation, (because they have expelled him thence) yet it is to be hoped he hath not quite given them over; as God affords them still many outward means of grace and reconciliation, so he affords them many

many inward motions to make thoſe means effectual to their recovery: And tho' their condition be infinitely more hazardous than it was, and their repentance more difficult, yet ſtill they may repent and recover. For, as I ſaid before, no man is forſaken of God, that is not given up to hardneſs of heart; I do not mean ſuch hardneſs of heart as ſome melancholy people fanſy they are troubled with; but I mean, a wretched ſtupidity, and unconcernedneſs about ſpiritual affairs, ſo that he lives in ſin, and knows that he doth ſo, and is content with his condition, and thus continues to live, without deſigning or endeavouring to return to God and his duty; which certainly is a ſad condition, and God Almighty deliver us from it, *&c.*

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SERMON III.

About Loſs of ſpiritual Comforts.

PSALM XLII. 6, 7.

According to the Tranſlation of our Liturgy.

Why art thou ſo full of heavineſs, O my ſoul? and why art thou ſo diſquieted within me? Put thy truſt in God, for I will yet give him thanks for the help of his countenance.

I Am now ſpeaking to the caſe of thoſe people, who are under great afflictions, upon account of the loſs of their ſpiritual comfort, which they uſed to feel in the performance of their religious exerciſes, and which they attribute to God's forſaking them, and leaving them to themſelves. Time has been, (ſay they) when they have taken great delight in the ways of God, and have experienced the comfortable influences of his Spirit upon their minds. They were then full

full of life and vigour, and could meditate, could read, could pray, could receive the ſacrament, with a great deal of devotion, and a great deal of ſatisfaction: But now they find a great abatement of their affections towards God: All their religious exerciſes are performed very heavily: They find no manner of ſweetneſs in them. On the contrary, they are very troubleſome to them; their hearts are like Pharaoh's chariots, either they cannot move at all in the way of God, or they move with wonderful difficulty. Is not this a plain indication, that God hath forſaken them, and withdrawn his preſence and aſſiſtance from them?

This is the caſe I am now upon; and in ſpeaking to it, I propoſed to do two things:

Firſt, To give an account of deſertion truly ſo called, or what it is for God to forſake a man; and to ſhew that theſe people have no reaſon in the world to apprehend that they are in that ſtate.

Secondly, To give a true account of thoſe effects which melancholy perſons are wont to aſcribe to God's forſaking them, and withdrawing his grace from them. And withal, to offer ſomething both for the direction and comfort of perſons that are in this condition.

The firſt of theſe points I diſpatched the laſt time. I now proceed to the other; which is, to give an account of thoſe effects which melancholy people are wont to aſcribe to God's forſaking them, and withdrawing his grace and Spirit from them; and likewiſe to offer ſuch things as may be of uſe, in order to their cure.

The firſt thing I have to repreſent is this: What if all the abatement of their affections towards God, all this dulneſs and deadneſs of heart in their devotions, which

which theſe good people complain of, do ariſe purely and ſolely from the temper of their bodies? I muſt confeſs, I think it doth ſo in all theſe caſes, where the man hath not brought this indiſpoſition upon himſelf, by a wilful neglect or diſuſe of his ſpiritual exerciſes, and giving himſelf up to a careleſs, worldly, or ſenſual life.

I touched upon this head, and ſpoke ſomething about the influence of the body upon the mind, in my laſt diſcourſe, where I ſpoke of religious melancholy in general: And here my argument leads me to treat a little more particularly of it. You all know that we conſiſt of two parts, a ſoul, and a body, which though they are diſtinct ſubſtances, and capable of ſubſiſting ſeparately, the one from the other; yet while we live in this mortal ſtate, they are, by the wonderful power of God, ſo cloſely united, that they do ſtrongly affect one another. Though it be our minds, or our ſpirits, or our ſouls, properly, that can be ſaid to think, or to reflect, or to perceive, or to remember, or to hope, or to fear, or to enjoy, and the like; yet all theſe operations are influenced by, and do receive a kind of tincture, as I may ſay, from that ſtate, and condition, and plight that the body is in. For it is plain by manifold experience, that our ſouls in this world cannot act at all, without the help and miniſtry of the purer parts of our bodily ſubſtance; which purer parts (let them conſiſt in what they will) we call by the name of animal ſpirits. Now as theſe animal ſpirits, which the ſoul makes uſe of as her inſtrument in all her intellectual operations; I ſay, as theſe are well or ill-diſpoſed, ſo will all the acts of our minds proceed accordingly: Sometimes, when they are quite ſtifled and oppreſſed,

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as in a fit of an apoplexy, and ſuch-like diſtempers, our minds, how vigorous ſoever they have been before, cannot think at all, but we are quite without ſenſe and perception. Again; At another time, when their motion is not quite damp'd, but yet, through a diſtemper, they move irregularly and tumultuouſly, as in the caſe of a violent fever; why then, tho' we do think, yet we think wildly, and extravagantly, and inconſiſtently, even to that degree, that we call it delirioufneſs, or frenzy. Again; At another time, when the animal ſpirits do move regularly, and are a fit inſtrument for the ſoul to work with; yet, as there is greater or leſſer plenty of them, as they are finer or groſſer, as they are more or leſs agitated; ſo accordingly are the operations of our ſouls more lively, or more dull, performed with more eaſe, or with more difficulty; with greater, or with leſs pleaſure and ſatisfaction to ourſelves. We cannot think ſo freely, after a full meal, nor ſo ſtrongly, after we are tired and diſpirited with bodily labour, nor ſo attentively, when we are diverted by pain, or outward objects. Nay, there are ſome conſtitutions ſo ſuſceptive of impreſſions from without, that the very change of weather occaſions a great change in the temper of the mind; as to its being chearful or melancholy, fit or unfit to think. And this alſo, as to our paſſions; as ſome men are inclined more to one paſſion, and others to another, ſo the very ſame perſon ſhall find the like difference in himſelf, being ſometimes, for inſtance, ſtrongly diſpoſed to chearfulneſs and joy, at other times to unuſual inclinations, to ſadneſs, and fear, and grief. Whence now proceed all theſe changes, and various diſpoſitions, that we feel in ourſelves? Certainly not

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ſo much from the ſoul, (for the habits and diſpoſitions of that are often, for all theſe varieties, the very ſame) but rather, they are, in a great meaſure, if not wholly, to be attributed to the variety of tempers, that the body is ſubject to; which the ſoul cannot many times either prevent, or alter.

And why may it not be thus in the buſineſs we are now concerned in? Why may we not aſcribe all that inequality we find in our affections towards God, and ſpiritual things, wholly to the inequality of the temper of our bodies? Without doubt, this is generally the cauſe of it: When our animal ſpirits are fine, and pure, and in a convenient plenty, then, whatever we apply our minds to, we can go chearfully about it, and vigorouſly purſue it; and, if then ſome religious matter be the object we employ our thoughts and meditation upon, we ſhall do it very ſucceſsfully; we ſhall be able to give a ſerious attention to what we are about, and ſhall have more lively apprehenſions of things, and theſe apprehenſions will be accompanied with ſuitable affections; ſo that, if we pray, we ſhall pray with greater ardor and fervency; if we read, or hear, it will be with greater intenſeneſs, and quicker apprehenſions; if we meditate, we ſhall do it with greater life and ſerioufneſs; and we ſhall raiſe ourſelves to an unuſual pitch of devotion: And a great deal of joy and delight will ariſe in our ſouls from this briſkneſs and vigour of their operations about ſuch excellent ſubjects. And if this activity of our animal ſpirits did always laſt, without doubt, it would be no hard matter to keep up always this life and vigour of our ſouls, in the exerciſe of religion, together with the ſatisfaction that does attend it. But here is the miſery;

ſery; theſe being in a conſtant flux, and obnoxious to a thouſand alterations and depreſſions, both from outward and inward cauſes, nay, being ſubject to be ſpent and diſſipated by the very employing them, (for there is no man that thinks warmly, and for a long time upon any thing, but mightily exhauſts his ſpirits, and leaves himſelf after ſuch intenſion very flat and languid) I ſay, this being the caſe, how can it be avoided, but that the ſoul muſt ſympathize with the body in all theſe alterations and decays, even as to her ſpiritual and religious operations, as well as others? Doth any man always follow his worldly affairs with the ſame briſkneſs and chearfulneſs? Can any man ſtudy, or read, or diſcourſe, at all times, with the ſame eaſineſs and ſatisfaction to his own mind? Doth not every man find himſelf ſometimes mightily out of humour, and dull, and liſtleſs, when he ſhould ſet himſelf about any of thoſe things; tho' perhaps he hath a great mind to it? And, if theſe varieties and inequalities of temper cannot be prevented in other things, what reaſon has any one to think, that his endeavours and performances in religion ſhould be exempted from them? Why ſhould he imagine, that he ſhould be always able to pray with the ſame fervour and affection, or that he ſhould always take that delight and ſatisfaction in the exerciſe of religion, that he ſometimes doth? No, as long as we have theſe bodies about us, the beſt men muſt expect theſe ebbs and flows of affection to the ſervice of God: And that, even when they are in good health; and therefore much more, if it ſhould be their misfortune to have their animal ſpirits depraved by hypochondriac indiſpoſitions; as moſt of the perſons whoſe caſe we are ſpeaking

ing to, no doubt, have. But, however, tho' theſe things may be their trouble, yet they are not their ſins, and this may be their comfort, that, tho' for the preſent they have loſt their former vigour and joy, and are quite out of humour for performing their religious duties, yet if they will have patience with themſelves, they will in time recover that good humour again: Their vigour and chearful temper of mind will return, as the accidental indiſpoſitions wear off from the body.

But ſome of theſe people, who complain of God's forſaking them, may ſay, that, in what I have hitherto ſaid, I have not reached their caſe; that which troubles them is not ſo much the flatneſs and deadneſs of their affections in devotion, now and then, which all good men are ſubject to; but this; they have quite loſt thoſe enraviſhing joys and conſolations which they have formerly felt in communion with God, and which could not be the mere effect of their own temper, and the briſkneſs of their natural powers, but were certainly the communications of God to their ſouls. They have heretofore been raiſed up many pitches above themſelves, and enjoyed ſuch pleaſures and ſatisfactions in their approaches to God, as far exceed all others upon earth. But now, tho' they cannot ſay but that they are as careful of their lives and actions as they were then, and endeavour to ſerve God as well as they can, yet the caſe is much altered with them; they have quite loſt thoſe manifeſtations of God's favour, that light of his countenance, thoſe glimpſes which were the ſupport of their ſouls, and the joy of their lives, and this is that they complain of.

Well,

Well, let us conſider this, in the ſecond place; and here I would firſt aſk theſe perſons how they come to know that theſe rapturous joys, they ſpeak of, were indeed owing to the power and influence of the Holy Ghoſt upon them? It will bear a juſt diſpute whether theſe overflowing joys and comforts, that are ſometimes felt upon the application of our minds to ſpiritual things, be always to be aſcribed to the operation of God's Spirit upon the mind; or, whether they be not often the mere effects of a heated brain, and a raiſed imagination: Or rather indeed, the thing is paſt diſpute; for it is certain, that, in ſome perſons, theſe effects, even in the higheſt degree of them, owe their production to no higher a cauſe than their natural powers: Witneſs the tranſports of joy, and the pleaſures, even to ecſtaſy, which many enthuſiaſtical perſons have felt, or at leaſt have given out that they have, in the exerciſe of the groſſeſt ſuperſtition of a falſe religion; and which many of the ſame complexion, have experienced likewiſe in the true religion; who, yet have been perſons of none of the beſt morals, but in truth, wholly devoid of the ſpiritual life: Now, I ſay, to attribute theſe raptures and ecſtaſies of joy, in ſuch perſons, to the Holy Spirit of God, will be very hard (at leaſt now-a-days, when miraculous powers are ceaſed). No, certainly all ſpiritual joy is not the joy of the Holy Ghoſt; a man may be ſometimes ſo full of joy, that his ſoul is even ready to break its priſon, and yet, for all that, not be a whit the more acted by a Divine Spirit.

But how ſhall we be able to know, when the joy and ſatisfaction we feel, in the exerciſe of religion, doth ariſe from the Holy Spirit, and when from our own

own tempers? This is a material queſtion, and thus I anſwer it: All thoſe joys that we can give no good account of, that ariſe in our minds we know not how, or wherefore; and likewiſe all thoſe joys, which, while we feel them, do not make us better, do not more incline us to love God, and our neighbour, do not more diſpoſe us to hate vice and impurity, and eſpecially the more ſpiritual impurities of pride and ſelf-love, which we may labour under; I ſay, all theſe joys and conſolations, how high and rapturous ſoever they be, are juſtly to be ſuſpected by us, as the pure reſults of our own heated temper. Theſe are the two certain marks and characters whereby we may be able to diſtinguiſh the peace and the joy, that ariſeth from the Holy Spirit, from that which ariſeth from the ebullition of our own animal ſpirits; namely, Firſt, That the peace and joy of the Holy Ghoſt is always rational; there is ſome good ground, ſome ſolid foundation for it in the mind of the man that feels it, which foundation is a good conſcience, a being able to ſatisfy ourſelves, from the teſtimony of our own hearts and lives, that we are ſincere and unfeigned in our deſires and endeavours to approve ourſelves to God, as his faithful ſervants. *This* (ſaith St. Paul) *is our rejoicing, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity we have had our converſation in the world.*

And ſecondly, This joy of the Holy Spirit is never a barren ineffectual joy, a joy that only amuſes and pleaſes us, without making us better; but it ſtrangely excites our diligence, and quickens our endeavours in the ſervice of God; it makes us to hunger and thirſt more earneſtly after his righteouſneſs, and puts us upon labour-

labouring after a greater participation of his divine nature: Above all things, it opens our hearts towards our brethren, and ſpurs us on moſt powerfully to do all the good we can in the world.

This is the nature, and theſe are the qualities, of that joy, which the Spirit of God worketh in the heart of believers; and, if that which we ſometimes feel, in the exerciſe of devotion, and at the loſs of which we complain, be not of this nature, and have not theſe qualities; let it be, otherwiſe, never ſo affecting and tranſporting, we cannot be aſſured that it is from God, Nay, rather, we have reaſon to conclude, that it is the effect of own our temper, and natural powers.

But now, having ſaid this by way of caution, that we may not take every pleaſing effort of an heated fancy for the manifeſtation of God's preſence, and favour to the ſouls of men; we will admit, that that joy, and thoſe pleaſures, at the loſs of which thoſe perſons complain, were really what they take them to be; namely, the effect of God's Spirit working upon their hearts; for I do not know, but that God's Spirit may, and often doth, influence the minds of good men, in ſuch a way as this: But then this we ſay, in the ſecond place, that the withdrawing theſe joys and ſenſible ſatisfactions from their minds, is no argument in the world of God's diſpleaſure againſt them, much leſs, of his forſaking them, and leaving them to themſelves. For it is to be conſidered, that the perſons, to whom God moſt frequently vouchſafes theſe extraordinary ſmitings, are uſually young beginners in religion; ſuch as are but newly enter'd upon a ſerious devout life, and, conſequently, muſt be ſuppoſed to have many difficulties to ſtruggle with, and many ſins to mortify.

mortify. Now, to perſons that are in theſe circumſtances, it is but reaſonable to think, that God may, now and then, for their encouragement, give ſome extraordinary taſtes of the pleaſures that are to be had in religion, and the enjoyment of his favour, which he doth not often afford to more grown chriſtians. As they are in the weakeſt and moſt imperfect condition, ſo the hardſhip and difficulty they have to undergo in religion are then the greateſt; ſo that they have real need of thoſe extraordinary ſupports; thoſe delicious reliſhes of God upon their minds are neceſſary, for the turning the balance againſt the allurements of ſin, which do ſtrongly preſs the affections the other way; they would not be able to reſiſt the temptations that daily come in their way, were they not thus borne up, by a moſt feeling ſenſe of the pleaſures of religion. This now being the caſe, what reaſon has any good chriſtian to be troubled or diſcontented at the loſs of thoſe ſenſible tranſporting joys, which he hath ſometimes experienced in the ways of God? Ought he from hence to conclude, that God loves him leſs than he did, becauſe he hath withdrawn thoſe comforts from him? No, not in the leaſt; he ought rather to conclude this, that, if he ſtill ſtood in need of them, God would have ſtill continued them; but, that he is now grown ſtronger, and advanced to ſuch a pitch of chriſtianity, that he needs them not. God now looks upon him no longer as a child, but as a man: and therefore doth no longer feed him with milk, but with ſtronger meat. Would it not be very unreaſonable, that, becauſe a parent uſeth his child more tenderly, and takes more pains about him, when he is ſick and weakly, than when he is in health, and able to ſhift

for himſelf; for one therefore to conclude, that that parent loved his child better then, when he was not able to look to himſelf, than he doth now that he is? Or was it not a very perverſe reaſoning of the elder ſon in the parable, that, becauſe upon the return of his hungry ſtarved brother, the prodigal, the father ordered the fatted calf to be killed, and made him a feaſt; whereas he had not treated him, the elder ſon, with ſuch expreſſions of kindneſs for many years before? I ſay, was it not a perverſe reaſoning in him therefore to conclude, that the prodigal diſobedient ſon was more dear to his father than he, that had ſerved him many years, and had never diſpleaſed him? Juſt the ſame perverſeneſs is it, to argue thus: That, becauſe God doth not feaſt us continually with thoſe ſpiritual delicacies, with which he formerly entertained us, or now entertains penitents or new converts, that, therefore, he hath withdrawn his favour from us, or is diſpleaſed at us. No, let us aſſure ourſelves, God's care over us is the ſame that it was then, and we ſhall want nothing that is needful for us; for all that he hath is ours, as the father there told his elder ſon: And, if he hath now taken away thoſe luſcious joys, which heretofore accompanied our religious endeavours, yet it is not out of any unkindneſs to us. Something he ſaw, that we did not; which made it highly reaſonable and expedient for us, that he ſhould thus deal with us. Either they were not proper for our ſtate, or we ſhould be apt to ſurfeit of them, and put them to a bad uſe. They might prove the incentives of pride, and contempt of others. They might hinder the purity and ſincerity of our love to God: or they might make us careleſs or negligent in our purſuit after the

moſt

moſt uſeful and manly virtues; and, for theſe cauſes, God in pure compaſſion and tenderneſs to us, deprived us of them.

But when a time comes that it will be reaſonable and fit we ſhould have them again; as for inſtance, when we are called out to ſome unuſual trial, or are expoſed to ſome imminent danger or temptation, where our faith and virtue will need theſe extraordinary ſupports: In this caſe, we need not doubt, but God will reſtore them to us with advantage. Thus uſually God ſtrengthens martyrs and dying chriſtians, giving them ſuch a ſenſe of his favours, and ſo invigorating their minds, that the greateſt dangers, and the moſt painful death, cannot diſcompoſe them; and thus, without doubt, he will ſhew himſelf to every honeſt heart, in every emergency, where there is need of ſuch a manifeſtation of his preſence: For God is faithful, and will never ſuffer any of his ſervants to be tempted above what they are able; but will with the temptation make a way to eſcape out of it, that they may be able to bear it.

But thirdly, Another thing that deſerves ſeriouſly to be conſidered by theſe perſons whoſe caſe I am ſpeaking to, is this: That that vigour and life, and thoſe ſenſible pleaſures and comforts, which they were wont to experience in holy duties, and of the loſs of which they complain, did not in the leaſt recommend them more to God whilſt they enjoyed them: Tho' they did much tend to the ſweetening their duty, and rendering the performance of it more ſatisfactory to themſelves; yet did they not, in the leaſt, render it more acceptable to God; for neither did they ſerve God really better, while they were full of theſe com-

forts, nor do they ſerve him worſe, now that they are without them: always ſuppoſing, they continue their endeavours, and do not flag in their reſolutions of living a holy life. Nay, ſo far are their duties from being leſs acceptable to God upon this account, that they are not accompanied with ſuch ſprightlineſs of affections, and overflowings of joy, as they were wont, but are performed droopingly and heavily; that, on the contrary, I ſcruple not to ſay, they are a great deal more. He that finds no pleaſure and delight in the ways of God, and yet, notwithſtanding, doth ſtill walk in them, and continues reſolved ſo to do, in ſpite of all diſcouragements he meets with, doth certainly expreſs a greater virtue, and ſhews a truer love to God, and conſequently is better accepted by him, than if he had I know not what ſpurs of ſenſible delight to prick him forwards. He that, when his mind is dull and heavy, and he cannot raiſe up his affections ſo nimbly towards God, yet ſtill makes a conſcience of ſaying his prayers, and prays as heartily as he can, tho' not ſo delightfully as he would, nor ſo paſſionately as he was wont; I ſay, ſuch prayers, as they proceed from a purer ſenſe of his duty, ſo, without doubt, they will be more effectual with God, for the obtaining what he really ſtands in need of, than if they were accompanied even with ecſtatical tranſports of fervour and joy.

God meaſures our ſervices by the inward ſincerity of the heart, and the honeſty of the mind, with which they are tender'd; and not by the fluttering of the ſenſible paſſions, that go along with them, or the extrinſical ſupports, which, in our eſteem, do give them advantage. He that is in love with his duty, only ſo

long as he receives great joy and ſatisfaction in it, or from it, ſhews (as ſome of our divines uſe to expreſs it) that he loves Chriſt Jeſus, more for the loaves he uſed to beſtow upon him, than for his own goodneſs and excellence. We then truly ſerve God, when we chearfully obey him for conſcience-ſake: But, whether that obedience be delightful or troubleſome, pleaſing or diſpleaſing to ourſelves, hath no other place in the eſteem or acceptance of God, ſave only this, that the greater the difficulties and diſcouragements are that we lie under, the more valuable are our ſervices to him, and the more highly ſhall they be rewarded.

Lift up thy head, therefore, O drooping ſoul! Be not dejected, that thy former joys have forſaken thee; that the light that hath ſometimes ſhined into thy mind, is intercepted by thick clouds that encompaſs thee; and that, inſtead of the green and pleaſant paſtures in which thy way hath hitherto lain, thou art come into a barren and dry wilderneſs: Think not that this change was meant thee for any hurt, but rather for thy exceeding good. Thou haſt now an opportunity put into thy hands, of ſhewing the ſincerity of thy affections to God, of expreſſing thy courage and reſolution in his ſervice: If, notwithſtanding theſe diſcouragements, thou purſueſt thy courſe, and doſt not treacherouſly fall back, aſſure thyſelf, tho' thou doſt not ſerve God ſo much to thy own ſatisfaction, as thou waſt wont, yet thy ſervice is much better; and he is more delighted to ſee thee follow him in theſe rugged paths, and under theſe diſcouragements, than when thy way was moſt pleaſant and ſmooth, and thou waſt carried on with the briſkeſt gales of affection and joy.

But fourthly and laſtly, to conclude: If theſe perſons, whoſe caſe I am ſpeaking to, do really deſire to find a perfect cure of thoſe grievances they groan under; the beſt advice (as may appear from all that has been ſaid) that can be given them, is, not to deſire nor covet theſe ſenſible joys and ſmitings in religion: But, on the contrary, to bring themſelves, if it be poſſible, to ſuch a ſtate of mind, that they can live contentedly and comfortably without them. We have ſeen what an influence the temper of our bodies moſt commonly hath, in the producing theſe kinds of effects, which temper we cannot, with our utmoſt care, preſerve always in a ſtable uniform tenor: We have ſeen likewiſe, that what God is pleaſed ſometimes, in an extraordinary way, to contribute to theſe effects by his Spirit, is not always to be expected, becauſe the thing is often unreaſonable, and no way fitting to be done. If therefore the comfort and happineſs of our lives depend upon having theſe joys and ſmitings, it is certain it will never be conſtant, but we ſhall be as often in a miſerable dejected condition, as we are in a comfortable and happy one. What then muſt we do? Why, let us not value thoſe things; let us not hanker after them, but ſeek our happineſs and comfort from ſomething elſe, ſomething that is built upon a more ſolid foundation, ſomething upon which our bodily temper hath not ſo much influence; which when all is done, muſt be the rational evidence, that we are able to give ourſelves, that we do ſincerely endeavour to pleaſe God, in thoſe ways that he hath taught us by Jeſus Chriſt his Son. The more our religion mingles with our paſſions, or depends upon them, the more uncertain and ſuſpected will it be always rendered unto us.

Let

Let us therefore labour to get ourſelves into a higher diſpenſation: Let us ſpiritualize our religion as much as we can, and make it a reaſonable ſervice: Let us draw it off, as much as is poſſible, from the lower ſenſitive ſoul (where the affections and paſſions are) where it is too often ſeated, and fix it in our minds and ſpirits: When it has once taken root there, it will not fail to bring forth the fruits of conſtant peace, and (whatever becomes of the ſenſible ſatisfaction) will perpetually repleniſh our hearts with comfort.

Would you always be in a calm ſerene ſtate of mind? Learn to love God heartily: poſſeſs your minds with a deep ſenſe of his love and goodneſs; of his preſence and providence; of the reaſonableneſs of his precepts; and the certainty of the rewards he hath promiſed in another world. Upon theſe conſiderations, devote your whole man to his ſervice, reſign up yourſelves intirely to his government. Let it be the conſtant deſire of your ſouls, and the endeavour of your lives, to do his will; and to ſubmit to it, whatever it be. Do but heartily recommend yourſelves to him, for his grace and holy Spirit, to enable you to do your duty, and to preſerve you in it; and leave all the reſt of your concernments, both outward and inward, wholly to his diſpoſal. This now is a religion truly ſpiritual and rational, and a life thus led will be a perpetual ſpring of uninterrupted peace to your minds; ſuch a peace as ordinarily no irregularity of temper, no flatneſs and dulneſs of affections, that may at ſome time ſeize you, no inward indiſpoſition, nor outward event, will be able to diſcompoſe. Nothing can rob you of it, but what robs you either of your virtue or of your wits and reaſon. For this is the rational peace

of a pure conſcience, which the inequalities of the ſenſitive nature can no ways affect, ſo long as the head of the man is not diſordered.

It is true, this peace is ſtill and quiet, it is not ſo violent, and boiſterous, and tranſporting as thoſe flaſhes of joy, which young converts now and then feel; or thoſe ſenſible ſmitings of devotion, that ariſe from heated and raiſed affections: But yet, it is a great deal more true and ſolid, it is more ſincere and unmingled, it is more conſtant and regular, it gives a better-grounded aſſurance to thoſe that have it, of the goodneſs of their condition: and laſtly, it is a peace that will never leave them, ſo long as they do not leave God, and their duty: Nay, the longer they live (provided ſtill their judgment continues ſound) the more it will grow and increaſe, the greater conſolations will they have in the ſervice of God, and the greater aſſurance that they are in his favour. And, the nearer they approach to death, the more delightful proſpect will they have of the happy place whither they are going. And, when they come to die, (where others ſtand fearful and trembling at the brink) they will with great calmneſs and aſſurance, reſign up their ſouls to God, being able to pronounce to themſelves with St. Paul, *I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord of righteous judgment will give me at that day.*

This peace, this intellectual peace, is that which we are to labour after, if ever we would live happy lives indeed; and as widely different it is, from thoſe tranſporting boiſterous pleaſures of religion, (of the loſs of

which

which the perſons I am ſpeaking of do complain) as the kindly warmth of the ſun is from the ſcorching of lightning; or, as the pure calm regions above are from this various and diſturbed air we breathe in.

In a word, this ſolid peace of conſcience is the true joy of the Holy Ghoſt, the fruit of the Spirit dwelling within us, in the ſenſe of which we ſhall be able to practiſe, without interruption, thoſe excellent precepts of the apoſtle, which ſeem to be the top of chriſtian morals: *Be careful for nothing, but in every thing give thanks: Count it all joy when ye enter into divers temptations: Rejoice evermore, and again I ſay rejoice.*

And thus much on the firſt caſe I propoſed to ſpeak to; the other, about the devil's temptations, and blaſphemous thoughts, I ſhall defer to the next time.

SERMON IV.

About the Devil, and his temptations.

2 Cor. II. 11.

Leſt Satan ſhould get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

AFTER a general account of that which we call religious melancholy, I came to ſpeak to two of the moſt uſual caſes of thoſe that are afflicted with it. The firſt was the caſe of thoſe that are in the ſtate of deſertion, as it is commonly called; that is, thoſe who have loſt all the ſweetneſs and comfort they uſed to find in the ways of religion, and the exerciſe of piety; and thereupon think, that God hath withdrawn his grace and Spirit from them. And this I have already ſpoken to.

The other is the caſe of thoſe that think themſelves given up to the power of the devil, upon account of the multitude of wicked blaſphemous thoughts and fancies, which do continually haunt their minds, do what

what they can to the contrary. And this I now come to ſpeak to; and for that purpoſe I have choſen for my text theſe words of St. Paul, *Leſt Satan ſhould get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Which words will afford us a fair handle, both for the diſcourſing this caſe, and alſo ſome other points relating to the temptations of the devil, which it may be of uſe to us to be well informed about.

I do not mean to ſpend time in giving an account of the particular occaſions upon which St. Paul ſpoke theſe words (which was that of the inceſtuous Corinthian) nor to enquire what thoſe particular advantages were, that he intimates Satan would get over the Corinthians, if they did not follow the advice that he here gives them; which was to reſtore that excommunicated inceſtuous brother to the peace of the church, upon his repentance. It is ſufficient for my buſineſs to obſerve, what is plainly intimated in theſe words of his, namely, the readineſs of the Devil to take all advantages of us, for the drawing us from our duty, and the arts and ſtratagems he makes uſe of, for that purpoſe; or, if you will, thus; that the Devil is always very buſy in tempting men to ſin.

This is the point that now comes under our conſideration from this text. There is hardly any doctrine of religion, about which men have more different notions and apprehenſions, than this of the Devil's tempting mankind. Some of us do not believe enough of it; others are apt to believe too much (as particularly thoſe perſons I before mentioned.) Now, for the rectifying the miſtakes both on the one hand and on the other, and the putting this matter into as

clear

clear a light as I can, I propoſe theſe following points as the heads of my diſcourſe upon this argument, which will indeed take in moſt of the difficulties that occur in it. That is to ſay,

Firſt, To enquire what is meant by the Devil or Satan, as he is here called in the text?

Secondly, Whether the Devil hath ordinarily a power to tempt men, eſpecially us chriſtians?

Thirdly, Whether all our temptations to ſin do ariſe from the Devil, or are to be aſcribed to him?

Fourthly, Whether the Devil hath a power to tempt all men alike, or the ſame perſon alike at all times?

Fifthly, Whether we can diſtinguiſh the Devil's temptations from the evil ſuggeſtions that ariſe in our minds from other cauſes?

Sixthly, What we are to ſay of thoſe wicked blaſphemous thoughts, and other troubleſome fancies, that are often injected into the minds of melancholy people, and which are uſually thought and called the Devil's temptations in a moſt proper ſenſe; and what is the moſt proper advice to be given in that caſe?

Of theſe in their order, as far as the time will give me leave.

I. The firſt enquiry is, Who we are to underſtand by the Devil?

This queſtion ought I think a little to be ſpoken to, if it was upon no other account than that extravagant opinion that ſome among us have taken up about this matter. According to them, the Devil that is ſo often ſpoken of in the ſcriptures, is nothing elſe but either a diſeaſe of the body, or a phantaſm in the brain, or the wicked principles and inclinations of a man's heart.

heart. This is the doctrine of Mr. Hobbs, and his followers.

But there cannot a vainer conceit enter into a man's head than this is. By the very ſame logic that they can prove this, they may likewiſe prove, that all thoſe men that are ſpoken of in the Old and New-teſtament, were not real perſons, but qualities. For it is certain, that the Devil is in the ſcripture as much repreſented as a perſon, a real ſubſiſting being, diſtinct from God and from good angels, and from mankind; I ſay, he is as plainly thus repreſented, as any man or woman that is there mentioned, is. And he, for inſtance, that will ſay, that when our Saviour was tempted by the Devil in the wilderneſs, all this was but a tranſaction of his imagination, and that it was only his own fancy that preſented to his eyes all the kingdoms of the world, and that it was only his own fancy that ſet him upon a pinacle of the temple, and would have had him fallen down and worſhipped it; I ſay, he that would give ſuch an account as this, of that matter, may with the ſame reaſon ſay, that Jeſus himſelf was but a phantaſm, an imagination, and that there was never ſuch a real perſon in the world.

The Devil then has a real being of his own, independent of us, or any other creature: and that being is of the ſpiritual or angelical nature. As there are good ſpirits, and good angels, ſo there are evil ſpirits, and evil angels; and of this latter ſort is the Devil.

But then ſecondly, When we are ſpeaking of the Devil, we are not to underſtand any one particular being, or any one particular evil ſpirit, but the whole aggregate, or company of evil ſpirits, which inhabit round about us in the lower regions of the air. All

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theſe are in the ſcripture language, and in common ſpeech, called by the name of the Devil, and ſometimes in the plural number, by the name of Devils.

For the underſtanding this we are to know, that among that infinite and innumerable company of angels which God created in a happy and glorious condition, all of them did not continue in that primitive happineſs: But ſeveral of them, by their wilful apoſtaſy from God, forfeited that dignity and glory they were poſſeſſed of, and ſo depraved their natures, that they were incapable of dwelling any longer where they did before: but were, by the juſt vengeance of God, caſt down into theſe lower regions of the air, where they are reſerved by providence, to the judgment and puniſhment of the great day.

This is the plain account that the ſcriptures give us as to this matter. Thus St. Jude in the 6th verſe of his epiſtle: *The angels*, ſaith he, *that kept not their firſt eſtate, but left their own habitations, them hath God reſerved in everlaſting chains under darkneſs, unto the judgment of the great day.* And juſt to the ſame purpoſe, and almoſt in the ſame words, doth St. Peter ſpeak in the ſecond chapter of his ſecond epiſtle, verſe the fourth.

Theſe fallen angels now thus thruſt down from heaven, tho' they do yet in a great meaſure retain all the intellectual accompliſhments of the angelical nature, ſuch as reaſon, and memory, and knowledge, yet are they in their moral qualities quite contrary to all the good angels; and particularly as to this, that as the good angels are infinitely kind and benign, great lovers of God and of mankind, and moſt intirely diſpoſed to do all good offices to them whatſoever;

ever; ſo the nature of thoſe fallen angels is cruel and revengeful, full of hatred, and ſpite, and malice to God, and to his whole creation; and upon account of this, the ſcripture hath given to them the name of Satan or Devil, which two words (as all that underſtand the learned languages know) ſignify neither more nor leſs than an adverſary, or an accuſer, or calumniator. The one being the Hebrew word for it, and the other the Greek word. And indeed it is, with reference to this enmity to mankind, that moſt of theſe names and characters that they bear in ſcripture, are beſtowed upon them. Upon this account it is, that the Devil is called a murderer, a deceiver, a lyar, and the father of lyes, the deſtroyer, the old ſerpent, the great dragon, with ſundry other ſuch appellations. But then, tho' theſe names being put in the ſingular number, ſeem to denote ſome ſingle evil ſpirit, that bears ill-will to mankind; yet we are always to remember, that they are to be expounded collectively, that is to ſay, to ſignify the whole body of theſe apoſtate ſpirits, of which there are a vaſt number: I ſay, the whole body of them; for that theſe lapſed angels are formed into a body politic, or government, or kingdom, is plainly enough intimated in the New-teſtament: For there we meet with the kingdom of darkneſs, in oppoſition to the kingdom of light; and there we meet with the prince of the Devils as the chief of them; who is likewiſe by St. Paul called, *The god of this world, and the prince of the power of the air.* Under whom alſo, as in other ſocieties, there are many ſubordinate officers, as St. Paul ſeems to intimate in the 6th of the Epheſians; where, among the wicked ſpirits in heavenly

venly places (that is, in the air, as Grotius, with the ancients, rightly expounds it) that he faith we wreſtle againſt, he makes mention in the plural number of principalities and powers, and other rulers of the darkneſs of this world.

This is the ſcripture account of theſe matters. I muſt confeſs, it may ſeem a very odd thing to ſome, that there ſhould be in the world a ſociety of ſuch ſpirits, as are confeſſedly endowed with all the knowledge and ſubtilty of the angelical nature, and yet are ſo horribly degenerated in their morals, as to take pleaſure in every thing that is naught, and even in ruining mankind, if they could. But that it is really poſſible that there ſhould be ſuch beings, doth in ſome meaſure appear from the prodigious inſtances of the depravation of reaſonable natures, that we ſometimes ſee among ourſelves, there being men of excellent parts and endowments to be found, that do ſometimes ſo far degenerate from human kind, that for all manner of wickedneſs and malice, they may be rather called Devils than men. But that it is more than poſſible, that there are a race of ſuch ſpirits, as do malign the welfare of mankind, and take pleaſure in making fools, and wretches, and ſlaves of them, is too evident, both from all the hiſtories of paſt ages, and from the ſad experience of ſome nations at this day; who (if we may credit the hiſtories that are writ of them) do miſerably groan under the violences and tyranny of the Devil. But however, no one that acknowledgeth the truth of the ſcripture, can poſſibly doubt of this; for what I have now delivered, is ſo plainly affirmed in the Old and New-teſtament, that there is no evading of it. And indeed, this hypotheſis of the being of evil

evil ſpirits, and their ill-will to mankind, and their concerning themſelves continually to do us miſchief, is ſo interwoven with, and makes ſo conſiderable a part of the ſcheme of our religion, as it is delivered by Chriſt and his apoſtles, that we cannot deny the one, without much weakening, if not altogether overthrowing, the other.

We take it then for granted, that there are abundance of evil ſpirits about us, which we call the Devils, who are inclinable enough to do us miſchief, by drawing us into ſin. But here comes the ſecond queſtion, Whether the Devil has ordinarily a power to tempt and ſeduce men at this day, eſpecially us chriſtians.

This is our ſecond general head of enquiry; and in anſwer to it, I lay down theſe ſeveral propoſitions: Firſt of all, It is certain the Devil hath no power to do any miſchief to any perſon or perſons, no, nor in the leaſt to come near them, or to tempt or ſolicit them to do evil, any farther than God gives him leave. Tho' there are a great number of evil ſpirits about us, yet it is not to be doubted but the armies of the living God, the holy angels, that are the miniſters of his providence for the good of mankind, are as near us, and are far greater both in number and ſtrength, than the others are; nor can any evil ſpirit have acceſs to us, without their permiſſion. This is acknowledged by the Devil himſelf, in the caſe of Job; nor doth any man call it in queſtion, that doth believe God to be the governor of the world.

Secondly, It is alſo granted, that the Devil had a greater power in the world, before our Saviour's coming, than he has had ſince. Before that time he had a kind

a kind of empire in the world, and therefore it is that he is called by St. Paul, *The god of this world.* For in a manner all mankind were in a degree of ſubjection to him (the Jews only excepted); and he did not only tempt them to evil actions, but did in a great meaſure govern them as to the affairs of their religion, ſeducing them from the worſhip of the true God, to the worſhip of himſelf. And as it was thus with the heathens before our Saviour's time, ſo it is at this day, in many places of the world, where the goſpel of Chriſt is not received, if we may believe the relations concerning them. But upon the preaching of the chriſtian religion he was thrown out of his poſſeſſion, his oracles were ſilenced, and thoſe that were his ſlaves before, were aſſerted into the glorious liberty of the ſons of God. And this was it which our Saviour told his apoſtles, ſpeaking of what will follow upon their preaching: *I ſaw* (ſaith he) *the Devil fall from heaven like lightning*, Luke x. 18.

Thirdly, Tho' upon our Saviour's coming, the Devil's empire was much diminiſhed, nay, and whereever chriſtianity was entertained, it was deſtroyed; yet notwithſtanding that, his power of tempting did ſtill remain; and, which is very conſiderable, he had at that time when the chriſtian religion firſt appeared in the world, a power allowed him of tempting chriſtians, one way more or greater than he hath ordinarily had ſince. The Devil's temptations are of two ſorts; he ſolicits and draws men to ſin, either by the way of diſcouragement, and affrightment, and terror, or by the way of allurements, and pleaſing inſinuations. Now in the former of theſe ways, he was permitted to lay moſt ſtrong temptations before all the firſt chriſtians;

ſtians; for he raiſed up the ſevereſt perſecutions againſt them that ever were heard of, engaging all the powers of the world on his ſide, to ſuppreſs, if it was poſſible, the farther growth of chriſtianity. And thus it was reaſonable to think he would do; for, as the apoſtle expreſſeth it, he had great wrath, as knowing or ſuſpecting that his time was ſhort.

This was the great ſtruggle between the kingdom of light, and the kingdom of darkneſs. The Devil's empire was at ſtake, and he knew he muſt loſe it in all places where the faith of Chriſt prevailed; and therefore he did the more vigorouſly exert all his power to baffle and ſtifle it.

And as it was reaſonable to think the Devil would do thus, ſo it was reaſonable to believe, that God would ſuffer him to raiſe theſe temptations. By them Chriſt's triumph over the kingdom of darkneſs was rendered more illuſtrious; and thoſe very methods which the devil made uſe of for the extirpating chriſtianity, proved the moſt effectual means for the ſpreading and propagating it thro' the world. But in the mean time, I muſt needs ſay, that I believe it was of this kind of temptations that the writers of the New-teſtament do ſpeak, when they tell us of grievous temptations, and of the fiery trials, and of the fiery darts of the Devil. It was to this kind of oppoſition that the apoſtle refers, when he tells the chriſtians, *That they wreſtled not againſt fleſh and blood, but againſt principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkneſs of this world.* It was chiefly with reſpect to theſe ſtorms of perſecution, which the Devil brought upon the firſt chriſtians, that St. Paul ſtiles him *a roaring lion, that went about, ſeeking whom he might devour.* I ſay,

I ſay, many of theſe paſſages, which ſpeak of the terribleneſs and violence of the Devil's temptations, ſeem to have reſpect chiefly to theſe firſt times, when Chriſt and the Devil ſtrove together for the victory; and all the powers of hell ſet themſelves to make one vigorous effort, againſt the prevailing of the goſpel in the world.

But fourthly, to come home to the point in queſtion; Tho' the Devil in the firſt times of chriſtianity, had greater power given him to tempt the diſciples of Chriſt, eſpecially in the way of terror and affrightment, than he hath ordinarily had ſince; yet ſo far as we can gather from the ſcripture, he hath even yet, at this day, a power to tempt both ways, and doth frequently do ſo. Our Saviour hath not yet ſo ſubdued all his enemies under his feet, but that there are enemies left: And theſe enemies, tho' they cannot do us ſo much miſchief as they would, or as they once could, yet will they do us what miſchief they can, and aſſuredly they do lay ſnares and temptations before us to that end.

But how do we prove this? How can we ſhew that the Devil hath any thing to do with any chriſtian profeſſor now-a-days? To this I anſwer, how can it be proved, that chriſtians are at this day exempted from the Devil's temptations? If there be no promiſe made to us of that kind, we will be bold to conclude, that we ſtill are obnoxious to them: becauſe there are ſuch things ſaid by our Lord, and his apoſtles, of the Devil's temptations, as will extend to chriſtians in all ages, unleſs they can plead a particular exemption from them.

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Our Saviour, in the 13th of Matt. ver. 19. tells us, that when any one heareth the words of the gospel, and understandeth it not, (that is, doth not consider and meditate upon it) then cometh the wicked one, or, as St. Mark has it, then cometh Satan, and catcheth away the seed that was sown in his heart. And this (saith he) is he that receiveth the seed by the highway. If now it be the Devil's property to put the thoughts of God's word out of mens heads, and to hinder them from taking up good resolutions thereupon, why should we not imagine that he is as busy with us now, as he was in old time? since we see the effects of this his working are as great as ever they were. Again, our Saviour, in the same chapter, giveth us the same doctrine in another parable; he is representing the state of his kingdom, how it should be from the beginning of it, to the end of the world. And he doth it very aptly, by resembling his church to a field, wherein the lord or owner of it sowed good seed, but an enemy sowed tares; and both grew up, and no separation was made of them till harvest; but then the reapers, by order of their lord, gathered the corn into the granary, and the tares they burnt. What is the application of this parable? Why our Saviour tells us directly in the 37th verse, that he that sowed the good seed was the son of man, that is, our Lord Jesus himself. The good seed were the right and faithful professors of the gospel: the tares were all wicked men that professed it: the enemy that sowed them, was the Devil: the harvest was the end of the world; and the reapers were the angels. This now certainly we may gather from this parable, that so long as there are wicked ungodly professors in the world,

world (and there will be always till the harveſt, till the end of the world) ſo long the Devil doth ſow tares, that is to ſay, ſo long he hath a hand in making men bad, and drawing them from the true ſpirit and genius of chriſtianity. There are ſeveral texts of ſcripture I might quote about this matter; the reaſon of which ſeems to concern all chriſtians to the end of the world, as particularly James iv. 7. where the apoſtle, exhorting all chriſtians againſt intemperate anger, and envy, and rage, gives them this advice; *Reſiſt* (ſaith he) *the Devil, and he will fly from you.* To this let me add the ivth of the Epheſ. 26, 27. There, ſaith the apoſtle, *Be ye angry, and ſin not; let not the ſun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the Devil.* Theſe two texts do plainly ſhew, that the Devil has oftentimes a hand in the tempting men to anger, and wrath, and envy, and ſuch other uncharitable works; and that by reſiſting the temptations to them, we do reſiſt the Devil. It is true, as I ſaid, that the ſins of wrath, and envy, and malice, and the like, are the proper characters of the Devil's nature, and it is probable, that he is moſt buſy in tempting to them. But yet, if he tempt to them, it is with great reaſon to be preſumed that he tempts to other ſins likewiſe, ſince they help forward his intereſts, and the hurt of mankind, tho' in another way. And thus we ſee the temptations to luſt are by St. Paul aſcribed to the Devil, *That Satan* (ſaith he) *tempt you not for your incontinency,* 1 Cor. vii. 5.

But to put this matter out of doubt, that chriſtians always were, and always ſhall be expoſed to the Devil's temptations, appears very plain, from the prayer which Chriſt left with his church, to be uſed by us to the

the world; I mean the Lord's prayer, the concluſion of which is, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*, ἀπο τȣ̃ πονηρȣ̃, *the evil one*, I ſay right, wicked one. If now we at this day were in no danger from the Devil, what need is there, nay, rather how abſurd would it be for us every day to pray to be delivered from him? For that by the evil one is principally meant the Devil, there can be no doubt.

To conclude this point: We chriſtians ſeem to be in the ſame condition with the Iſraelites, after they came out of Egypt into the land of Canaan; as they at their entry into that land had all the power of the Canaanites ſet againſt them, to hinder them from the conqueſt of it, and even after they were ſettled there, God ſtill left ſome of the Canaanites in the land, nay, and ſaith, he always would do ſo, that he might prove the Iſraelites, whether they would keep the way of the Lord to walk therein; ſo it is with us chriſtians; tho' our Saviour hath broken the head of the old ſerpent, hath outed him out of his kingdom, by ſettling his religion amongſt us, yet there is ſo much power left to him, as that he is ſtill in a condition to diſturb us, and by himſelf, and his miniſters, to lay ſnares in our way: And all this, as God ſaid to the Iſraelites, that God may prove us, whether we will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein; *Therefore hath the Lord left theſe evil angels, without driving them out haſtily, neither hath he delivered them into our hand.* As I may apply the words, Judges ii. 22, 23.

But then, fifthly and laſtly, We are always to remember this, that tho' God do ſuffer the Devil to tempt us, yet he never gives him leave to do more than tempt us. The Devil cannot force us to do that which

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is evil. He hath no more power over us, than our vicious acquaintance have, that we converſe with. They can, and they do, propoſe objects, and occaſions, and opportunities, by which we are oftentimes tempted to depart from our duty, and to do ſomething that we ought not to do. And they likewiſe can, and do apply theſe temptations ſo vigorouſly by their perſuaſions and counſels, and a thouſand ſly ſuggeſtions and inſinuations, that we ſhall be in very great danger, if we do not watch carefully over ourſelves, to be overcome by them.

Thus much the men of the world daily do, and the Devil doth no more; nor can he do more, when he ſets himſelf moſt vigorouſly to do us miſchief. He can preſent objects, or raiſe phantaſms in our minds about them; he can move, and invite, and allure, and ſolicit. But this is all he can do; he cannot in the leaſt compel us to depart one ſtep out of that way which we have propoſed to ourſelves, unleſs we ourſelves have a mind. He may put a fairer gloſs upon a temptation than it would otherwiſe have appeared in to us; and he may, it is likely, ſuggeſt ſuch motives to us to comply with it, as would not perhaps have come into our heads, had he not been about us. But ſtill we are left to our own choice and liberty, whether we will comply or not; ſtill we are maſters of ourſelves, and may order our own actions as we pleaſe; and if it ſhould happen at any time, that the tempter ſhould put us hard to it, and lay ſuch ſnares before us, as, conſidering our natural weakneſs and frailties, we ſhould ſcarcely avoid falling into; why then, is the Spirit of Chriſt, and the heavenly hoſt of angels that attend him, ready at hand to ſuccour and aſſiſt us, and to fortify

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our minds with such strength and power, as that we shall not be overcome, unless we be traitors to God and ourselves. *For greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the world*; as the apostle hath told us.

So that, after all, as things are contrived, the meanest and the weakest of us is able to match all the powers of hell. And they cannot do us the least mischief any farther than we ourselves contribute to it. Nay, so far are they from being able to do us mischief, that there is not any temptation they present to us, but it is in our power, thro' Christ's assistance, to turn it to our great benefit and advantage: As God hath thought fit to leave us exposed to the Devil's attempts, for the exercise of our virtue, so he hath taken care to order matters in such a way, that we may always do ourselves good, and improve both our virtue and rewards, by the assaults of the Devil, though he can do us no harm by them.

And thus much of the second head of enquiry; I now proceed to the third, and that is this; Whether all temptations to sin, or all sins we fall into by temptation, are to be ascribed to the Devil? This question I put, because many among us are so ready, at every turn, to charge their miscarriages upon him, and to remove the blame from themselves; but how unreasonable this is, will appear by what I shall briefly represent in an answer to this enquiry, and therewith I shall conclude.

First of all, it cannot be denied, that in a remote sense, and with respect to the original of sin, the Devil may be said to be the author and the cause of all the sins of mankind; since it was he that first drew our first parents from the state of their innocency, and by

their fall, brought ſin into the world. Accordingly, in the ſcripture-language, *All ſins and impieties, of what kind ſoever, are the works of the Devil, and all thoſe who do commit ſin, are ſaid to be of the Devil, who was a ſinner from the beginning.* Secondly, there is likewiſe no doubt, but that the Devil is at all times buſy and active for the promoting ſin in the world, as he hath opportunity; he goes to and fro in the earth, (as he ſpeaks of himſelf in the firſt chapter of Job) obſerving how his work goes forwards, and very induſtrious without doubt he is, in helping forwards the intereſt of his kingdom. And wherever he ſees that there is need of his immediate particular application or aſſiſtance, for the carrying on a buſineſs, there, to be ſure, he is ready to afford it, if God gives him permiſſion.

But then, in the third place, if we ſpeak with reference to all the particular temptations which are preſented to a man, or all the particular ſins which a man falls into by temptation, then we ſay, it is very improbable that the Devil ſhould have an immediate hand, either in all of them, or in moſt of them; for indeed, there is no need he ſhould concern himſelf in every particular action: For the generality of men are too ready to commit ſin, without waiting for a temptation from him; to that pitch of degeneracy is the nature of mankind arrived, that, God knows, many of us are too prone to do naughty things even without a tempter, and there is no doubt but we do a great many when no one doth inſtigate us to them, but we blindly follow our own appetites and paſſions, and the evil habits, and cuſtoms, that we have brought upon ourſelves; and when there happens a caſe, that there doth

doth need a tempter to a bad action, why, alas! there are too many visible ones, that we converse with, that take the Devil's office out of his hands, and render his assaults perfectly needless.

But, fourthly and lastly, Whether the Devil doth immediately tempt us to our sins, or doth not, yet this will make but little difference as to the guilt, if we have committed them. I would ask any one that is drawn to commit lewdness, or drunkenness, or the like; whether he thinks he doth much extenuate his guilt, either before God, or to his own conscience, by pleading, that the company that he was engaged in did tempt him to these sins, and that he had not been guilty of them, if he had not lit into that conversation. I dare say, he will not be so partial to himself, as to think this is any tolerable excuse: And if the human temptations we meet with in the world, be no just excuse for our sins, it is certain, the Devil's temptations can be none neither: For it is certain the Devil cannot tempt more strongly than men can do, and though he may convey his temptations in another kind of way, than those of mankind are applied, yet let them be conveyed as they will, we are as much at liberty (as I said before) whether we will yield to them, and have as much power to resist them, as we have to resist those that come upon us in the ordinary way of conversation or example, and the like. So that when all is done, we are to lay the guilt of our sins no where, but at our own doors: Whether the Devil applied the temptation to us, or applied it not, it matters not much; it was we ourselves, that, by consenting, brought the sin upon us.

And thus much of our third head of enquiry; those that remain I shall refer to the next time.

SERMON V.

About blaſphemous Thoughts.

2 COR. II. 11.

Leſt Satan ſhould get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

THE ſubject I am now upon is the Devil's temptation; a point which creates a great deal of trouble to ſome ſorts of people.

In order to the diſcourſing clearly upon it, I propoſed theſe ſix following heads to be enquired into:

Firſt, Whom we are to underſtand by Satan, or the Devil?

Secondly, Whether the Devil hath ordinarily a power to tempt men, eſpecially us chriſtians?

Thirdly, Whether all our temptations to ſin do ariſe from the Devil, or are to be aſcribed to him?

Fourthly, Whether the Devil hath a power to tempt all men alike, or the ſame men at different times?

Fifthly,

Fifthly, Whether we can diſtinguiſh the Devil's temptations from the evil ſuggeſtions that ariſe in our minds from other cauſes?

Sixthly, What we are to ſay of thoſe wicked blaſphemous thoughts, and other troubleſome fancies, that are often injected into the minds of melancholy people, and which are uſually thought and called the Devil's temptations in a moſt proper ſenſe; and what are the moſt proper advices to be given in that caſe?

The three former of theſe enquiries I have already ſpoken to in my laſt diſcourſe, and there is no need I ſhould repeat any thing I then ſaid concerning them, in order to the making way for what I am now to deliver; ſave only this, that I then largely proved from the ſcripture, that tho' the Devil hath not ſo great a power over us chriſtians, as he had over mankind before our Saviour's appearance, or as he has ſtill in ſome countries, where the light of the goſpel never ſhone; yet nevertheleſs, we are not exempted altogether from his aſſaults: He hath a power of tempting us ſtill left him, which he doth frequently exerciſe in ſuch manner, and at ſuch times as God is pleaſed to permit.

Taking now this for granted, I proceed to my fourth enquiry, which is this: Whether we chriſtians are equally expoſed to the Devil's temptations, or whether he hath not more power to tempt ſome than others, and the ſame perſons more at ſome times, than at other times.

To this I anſwer: It is very reaſonable to believe, nay, it is very certain, that the Devil hath not power over all perſons alike, nor upon the ſame perſon always equally; but every one, as he is more or leſs

under the conduct of God's Spirit, and under the protection of his holy angels, ſo is he leſs or more obnoxious to the ſnares of the Devil. And every man likewiſe, as he grows better or worſe in his morals, as he leads a more holy or a more ſenſual wicked life, ſo is he more or leſs under the care of the Holy Spirit, and the good angels.

Some perſons, that are intirely and heartily the ſervants of God, and walk cloſely with him in the exerciſe of all chriſtian virtues; theſe perſons are ſo much under the guidance and government of God's Spirit, and are ſo guarded by the inviſible miniſters of the kingdom of light, that it is to be hoped the Devil hath but little acceſs to them: nay, perhaps none at all, unleſs there fall out ſome extraordinary occaſion, that God, for the greater exerciſe and improvement of their virtue, may think fit to ſuffer the Devil to create them ſome diſturbance, as it was in the caſe of St. Paul; who, leſt he ſhould be puffed up through the gifts of revelations, which were vouchſafed to him, there was, as he tells us, given him a thorn in the fleſh; an angel of Satan to buffet him. And tho' he prayed thrice that it might be removed, yet the anſwer which was given him was, *My grace is ſufficient for thee*, ſee 2 Cor. xii. 7. Intimating, that God would not remove the temptation, but however he ſhould ſo far aſſiſt him with his grace, that the temptation ſhould do him no miſchief.

Thus, I ſay, the caſe ſtands, as to good and holy men; the Devil hath ordinarily but very little to do with him; but as for others, that do not thus endeavour to recommend themſelves to God's favour, but are looſe and careleſs in their lives, and have no ſenſe of

of religion upon their minds, or fear of God before their eyes, I do not doubt but the Devil hath a much greater power over thoſe; and tho' they may not be wholly abandoned by God, but are ſtill under the care of his general providence, by which the Devil is kept from committing thoſe downright violences, and putting thoſe groſs cheats and abuſes upon mankind, eſpecially the chriſtian profeſſors, which otherwiſe he would; yet, ſo long as they continue in this ſtate of irreligion, they are, in a great meaſure, under his conduct, and ſtill, the worſe they grow, the more they are ſo. And if once they come to that pitch of wickedneſs, that they let themſelves looſe to all kinds of vice, and commit ſin with greedineſs, without remorſe or reflection, then it is to be feared, they may be ſaid to be given over to the power of the Devil; *To be his ſlaves and vaſſals, and to be led captive by him at his will and pleaſure*; which are the very expreſſions of St. Paul, concerning ſuch perſons: So that, even as to bad men, the Devil hath not always the ſame power, but over ſome he hath a greater, and over others a leſs, ſtill in proportion to the degrees of their wickedneſs and degeneracy. As the operations of the Holy Spirit are various, according to the capacity and diſpoſition of the ſubject he works upon, there being ſome who are not yet in the ſtate of regeneration, whom he only invites and ſolicits by his holy motions to amend their lives, and to become holy and virtuous: But others, that are actually regenerate, he dwells within them as in a temple, and is a conſtant principle in them of holy and virtuous actions: So it is in ſome meaſure as to the Devil's operations upon men; ſome men he only tempts, but others he hath

ſo great a dominion over, that tho' it may be he cannot properly be ſaid to poſſeſs them, or to dwell in them, yet they are as much his own, as if he did, Thus as St. Stephen, in the ſixth of the Acts, is ſaid to be filled with the good ſpirit, ſo Ananias, in the fifth of the Acts, after he had ſet his heart to do that wickedneſs, for which St. Peter ſtruck him dead, is ſaid to be filled with the bad ſpirit. *Why hath Satan* (ſaith St. Peter) *filled thine heart to lye to the Holy Ghoſt?*

And as it is thus with reſpect to bad men compared one with another, ſo it is with reſpect to the ſame perſons at ſeveral times, as they grow more wicked. When Judas firſt entered upon a deſign of betraying our Saviour, then it is only ſaid, that *the Devil put it into his heart*; he only tempted him to it, John xiii. 2. But when he had given his intire conſent to the action, and, notwithſtanding our Saviour's diſcovery of him at ſupper, ſtill perſiſted in that wicked deſign, having his heart fully bent upon it; then it is told us, that Satan entered into him, as you have it in the 27th verſe; he had now gotten full dominion over him, and from henceforward made him act as he pleaſed.

The reaſon, for which I inſiſt upon this point, and the uſe I make of it, is this; that it infinitely concerns all of us to keep cloſe to God and our duty; and as we love our ſouls, to have a care of all wilful open crimes, that do wound our conſciences, and diſhonour our religion. For all ſuch crimes, as they grieve the Holy Spirit, and drive him away from us, ſo do they put us out of the particular protection of the good angels, and leave us more expoſed to the aſſaults and temptations of wicked ſpirits, that bear us evil will.

So

So long as we walk uprightly before God, and in all our actions do heartily endeavour to approve ourſelves to him, we need not fear the leaſt miſchief or damage from any of the powers of darkneſs; and tho' they may now and then be permitted to ſpread their temptations before us, yet this ſhall redound to our own greater benefit and comfort. But every great and wilful departure from God and our duty, gives the Devil an advantage over us; and that advantage he may ſo manage and improve (unleſs we, by our timely repentance, and return to our duty, prevent the ill conſequences) that he will more and more get us under his power, till at laſt God give us over, and we be wholly reduced among the number of the Devil's children and ſervants: And when we are once come to this ſad condition, he is (without an extraordinary interpoſition of divine mercy) ſo ſure of us, that he will not need to throw away much of his time and pains in tempting us to this or the other particular evil action; for, being acted by his principle, we ſhall run faſt enough on, in doing his buſineſs, without his immediate inſtigation: Nay, as I ſaid in my former diſcourſe, we ſhall take his office out of his hands, and prove devils to thoſe about us, by tempting them to be as bad as we ourſelves are; but God Almighty preſerve us all from this deplorable ſtate.

My fifth enquiry upon this argument, is this; Whether it be poſſible for us, ordinarily to diſtinguiſh the Devil's particular temptations, from thoſe that come to us other ways; as for inſtance, from our own vicious inclinations, or from the men of the world?

In anſwer to this, I ſay, that as far as we can judge by reaſon and experience, it is hardly poſſible for us to

diſtinguiſh them. My reaſon is, that tho' the Devil hath a power of making application to our minds, in a more immediate way, than by the means of our outward ſenſes, yet ſuch is the conſtitution of our natures, that he can convey nothing to our minds, but juſt in ſuch a manner as our own thoughts and reaſoning are occaſioned in us; and thoſe things he repreſents, will make juſt ſuch impreſſions upon our minds, as the things that are repreſented by other cauſes, upon other occaſions. So that it will be impoſſible for us to diſtinguiſh between theſe ſuggeſtions that he cauſeth in us, and thoſe that ariſe from the temperament and complexion of our own bodies.

To give a fairer account of this. The motions which are made in our bodies to that which is good, and the temptations which are ſuggeſted to that which is evil, are, without doubt, preſented and performed in the ſame way. There is no doubt, but all chriſtians have a great deal of aſſiſtance from the Spirit of God, and his holy angels, in the way of godlineſs. It is to the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, that every good man owes his ſpiritual regeneration, or new birth; and it is likewiſe to the influences of the ſame Spirit, that he owes his proficiency and growth in grace and virtue. Nay, even thoſe, that are not in a ſtate of grace, that are not yet regenerate, but live looſly and careleſly; yet ſo long as there are any hopes of them, ſo long the Spirit of God ſtrives with them; ſo long he takes occaſion to ſolicit and tempt them; (if I may uſe the word in that ſenſe) to leave that courſe of life they are engaged in, and to become ſeriouſly pious and religious. In a word, both the good and the bad do receive a great many good motions from the divine Spirit:

rit: A thouſand holy thoughts are ſuggeſted to our minds by him, and by the holy angels that act under him for the good of the church of God. But yet all theſe motions and ſuggeſtions, nay, all the operations of theſe heavenly ſpirits upon us, are performed in ſo natural, ſo familiar, ſo imperceptible a way, that it will be hard for any man to ſay that he can diſtinguiſh them from the actings of his own mind. We feel them no otherwiſe, than we do our own thoughts and meditations; nor can we in the leaſt diſtinguiſh them, by the manner of their affecting us, from our natural reaſonings, and the natural operations of arguments and motives upon our minds.

And this imperceiveableneſs of the impreſſions made upon our ſouls by the Holy Spirit, was that which our Saviour ſignified to Nicodemus, in the iiid of St. John, by the ſimilitude of a wind, *which*, ſaith he, *we hear the ſound of*; *but we know not whence it cometh*, *nor whither it goeth*: That is, we find the effects of it, which it leaves behind it, but know not at all the way of its motion; *even ſo*, ſaith he, *is every one that is born of the Spirit*. And thus, without doubt, it is as to the motions and temptations of the contrary ſpirits, the ſpirits of darkneſs, they ſolicit us to evil ſeveral ways; ſometimes by ſetting on our acquaintance to tempt us; ſometimes by exciting our paſſions and appetites, upon the preſence of a tempting object; by ſuggeſting to our minds ſome motives and conſiderations, that may more effectually recommend a ſin to us; or by bringing to our remembrance ſomething that may render us more inclinable to it. But now, all theſe operations of theirs are wrought in a method ſo ſuitable, ſo proportionate to our natures, and to

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our ways of acting, that, as in the outward temptations, it is impoſſible to diſtinguiſh when our friends tempt us of their own accord, and when the Devil ſets them on to tempt us: So in the inward temptations that are made more immediately to our ſouls, it is impoſſible to know, when our evil thoughts and deſires are the reſults purely of our minds, occaſioned by the natural conſtitution, or the preſent circumſtances we are in; and when they are ſuggeſted to us by any evil ſpirit.

I ſpeak of their ordinary actings; for, as for the extraordinary inſpirations of men by the Spirit of God, in the age of miracles; or the extraordinary actings of the Devil, in perſons that are poſſeſs'd: of theſe, I ſay, I ſpeak not. In truth, the actings of ſpirits upon our minds, whether they be good or bad, are performed in a way ſo like our own acting, that we could not have known that they make any immediate application to our minds, or indeed have any thing to do with us, were it not that the holy ſcripture declares that they have ſuch a power, and do exerciſe it; and that the viſible effects in our lives, which are conſequent upon their actings, do confirm to us what the ſcripture hath declared.

As for what has been ſometimes ſaid, that we may know the Devil's ſuggeſtions from the motions of our own minds, by the ſuddenneſs and unexpectedneſs of them, and the violence and impetuouſneſs with which they are accompanied; I muſt confeſs, I think it has no great weight in it; becauſe there is no man that has ſeriouſly attended to the working of his own mind, but will experience, that he hath often had very odd and extravagant thoughts come into his head on a ſudden,

ſudden, (and thoſe vigorouſly enough impreſſed) without any occaſion, that he can give an account of, where, yet, there has not been the leaſt reaſon to ſuſpect, that the Devil had any hand in the infuſing of them; becauſe they were not at all relating to his intereſt: But (as there is great reaſon to believe) they did purely and ſolely ariſe from the preſent temper and motion of his animal ſpirits, which accordingly as they move regularly or irregularly, more briſkly or more ſlowly, have a power of exciting in the ſoul thoughts and fancies of a differing nature. And hence come all the extravagancies of dreams, the odd flights and recoveries of thoſe that are in feveriſh diſtempers, and likewiſe the ſtrange conceits and fancies of melancholy and hypochondriacal perſons; of ſome of which I now come to give an account in my ſixth and laſt enquiry: And that is this;

What we are to ſay to thoſe wicked and blaſphemous thoughts, and other extravagant fancies, that are oftentimes injected into the minds of good people.

It is not all perſons that do complain of theſe kind of thoughts; thoſe that are very bad, are ſeldom troubled with them. Nor is it all good perſons that are thus haunted, but chiefly thoſe that are of a melancholy conſtitution, thoſe of the devout ſex, women, are more thus afflicted than the other ſex. Theſe that I ſpeak of are grievouſly diſturbed with odd, unreaſonable, nay, and ſometimes, impious, blaſphemous phantaſies, which are ſuggeſted to their minds, they do not know how, nor upon what occaſion: But, the more they ſtrive againſt them, ſtill the more impetuouſly do they come into their heads, and then eſpecially, when they ſet themſelves to the more

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ſolemn exerciſe of religion, and endeavour to be more than ordinarily devout: At theſe times, to be ſure, they ſhall be moſt grievouſly tormented with them. What now ſhall we ſay to theſe things?

The perſons themſelves that are thus exerciſed, do not in the leaſt doubt, but that all this comes from the Devil; nay, they have ſometimes ſuch dreadful apprehenſions of his power over them, that they are apt to fanſy that God hath withdrawn himſelf from them, and given them up intirely to him; and that theſe wicked thoughts of theirs are the very ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, of which there is no pardon. Theſe perſons are much to be pitied, becauſe, really, the condition they are in, renders their lives very uneaſy and uncomfortable; but yet they are certainly more afraid than hurt, and that which they complain of ſo tragically, ſeems not to carry any great danger along with it; for truly all this is to be looked upon, rather as an infelicity, or a natural affliction, which they ought to bear patiently, as they do other croſſes and miſadventures, than as a guilt, that ſhould lie upon their conſciences. And ſo far are theſe kind of thoughts (be they never ſo bad) from being the effects of God's letting looſe the Devil upon them, or from being the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, which is the greateſt of all ſins, that I am verily perſuaded, that they are no ſins at all, ſo long as they do not contribute to their coming into their minds, nor give conſent to them, while they are there. And it is very certain, that thoſe perſons that are never thus troubled and diſturbed about their thoughts, who yet ſo little govern their own minds, as to let their heads be a conſtant ſcene of abundance of vain, and looſe, and naughty fancies, favouring

vouring of ambition, or covetouſneſs, or voluptuouſneſs, or uncharitableneſs, or the like: I ſay, theſe perſons are in a much more dangerous condition, thro' ſuch thoughts as theſe, which pleaſe and delight them, than theſe honeſt ſcrupulous chriſtians, that are thus grievouſly perplexed at the wicked imaginations which they cannot help. Well, but what account can we give of this ſort of thoughts? And what is to be preſcribed in order to a cure of them? Why, of theſe two things I will give you my thoughts very briefly.

And I begin with the firſt, What account is to be given of them? Are ſuch thoughts really the effects of the Devil's temptations upon our minds, or are they the reſults of our own temper and complexions?

To this I anſwer, That though I dare not be poſitive in this matter any way, yet I verily believe, that for the moſt part, they are wholly to be aſcribed to the diſtemperature of our bodies, to the irregular motions of our animal ſpirits, (which are the inſtruments our ſouls uſe in thinking) occaſioned by hypochondriac vapours, or hyſteric paſſions, or other ill affections of our natural humours, and that the Devil hath no hand in them. This, I ſay, to me ſeems moſt probable; and that, for theſe reaſons:

Firſt, It ſeems a hard thing to believe, that the Devil ſhould have ſuch a conſtant acceſs to good men, or be permitted to exerciſe ſo much power over them, as he muſt be ſuppoſed to have, and to exerciſe, if he be the author of all thoſe idle or wicked thoughts, which they ſo frequently complain of. It is more reaſonable to believe, as I ſaid before, that, being under the perpetual conduct of God's Spirit, and the protection

protection of the good angels, the wicked ones have but little to do with them.

But, ſecondly, it deſerves to be conſidered, that the Devil's time of applying his temptations is, when he finds us moſt ſecure and careleſs, and not when we are moſt watchful and diligent, in keeping our own hearts. He is moſt buſy about us, when he finds that we have the leaſt guard upon ourſelves, and dreading no dangers from him, are ſupine and negligent about our ſpiritual concernments. Here is a fit occaſion for the Devil to lay his ſiege to us, and he may reaſonably hope for ſome advantage: And accordingly it is at ſuch times as theſe that he doth uſually aſſault us. But now, in the caſe we are ſpeaking of, it is quite otherwiſe; for it is not, when we are more remiſs, that we are moſt troubled with theſe ſinful fancies, but, on the contrary, when we ſtrive moſt to preſerve our minds in a holy and devout frame; the more we endeavour to keep theſe fancies out of our heads, ſtill the more we are vexed with them: Which is an argument, that they are not of the Devil's injection, who uſeth to lay his baits more ſeaſonably and cunningly, but are the effects of a diſtemper'd vapour'd head: Eſpecially, when we take this too into the conſideration, that the Devil generally doth not get much advantage by ſuch kind of ſuggeſtions; for, though they do ſufficiently diſturb the men that have them, yet they generally produce no ill effect, as to their morals. On the contrary, they make them a great deal more careful about their thoughts, and words, and actions, than otherwiſe they would have been; which is no great indication they come from the Devil, but rather an argument that they do not.

To

To which I add, in the third place, That the Devil's temptations, as they are otherwiſe timed, ſo they are likewiſe framed in another kind of way than theſe we are now ſpeaking of. His method is to apply his temptations in ſuch inſtances as are agreeable to our inclinations, and that we are moſt likely to comply with; but not in inſtances which he knows we hate and abhor, and can never be brought to conſent to. Thus, for inſtance, if the Devil ſhould have a mind to tempt, by ſuggeſting of thoughts, he would tempt a proud man, by filling his mind with fooliſh and vain conceits of himſelf, and contemptuous thoughts of other men: He would tempt a luſtful perſon, by raiſing his deſires, and heightening his imagination of unlawful ſenſual pleaſures, and the like. Thus now it is reaſonable to believe, that the Devil, if he underſtands his own intereſt, ſhould tempt; and thus, without doubt, he does tempt. But it ſeems very odd and unaccountable, that he ſhould tempt a man by ſuch things, as he knows the man has not only no natural inclination for, but the greateſt averſion to, of all things in the world; as it is in the caſe we are now ſpeaking of.

But, fourthly, The great argument by which I conclude, that theſe diſturbing thoughts are not injected by the Devil, (as the perſons afflicted with them are apt to believe) but are owing to an ill habit of body, is, that they themſelves, if they be aſked, can, for the moſt part, give an account how, and when, and upon what occaſions, theſe diſturbances of their thoughts came upon them. And, by the account they give, it will ſufficiently appear, to all diſintereſted competent judges, that their minds were never diſturbed with

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theſe thoughts, till their bodies were firſt out of order; that is to ſay, either by ſome great fit of ſickneſs, or by ſome grievous croſs and diſappointment, that lay heavy upon their ſpirits, or by ſome melancholy humour, that, through the indiſcreet uſage of themſelves, hath prevailed upon them. I ſay, if it be nicely enquired into, it will be found, that there was always an indiſpoſition of body, precedent to theſe diſorders of the mind; and that this was really the cauſe of theſe diſorders, is evident from hence, that, in all thoſe that we know of, where this indiſpoſition hath been removed, and the body reſtored to its former health and vigour, the diſturbances of their thoughts have preſently ceaſed, and they have been as well in their minds as ever they were before.

But if, after all this, any man will ſay, that thoſe thoughts do not take their riſe wholly from bodily diſtemper, but that alſo the Devil hath a hand in them, namely, thus far, that he takes advantages of theſe diſorders in our humour, and, by the means thereof, doth either excite theſe thoughts in us, or impreſs them more vehemently upon us (which is indeed the common opinion of divines): I ſay, if any one thinks this to be a better account of the matter, he may, for all me, enjoy his own ſentiments, ſo long as he will agree with me, (and I think all are agreed in it) that theſe wicked blaſphemous thoughts complained of, are not the effects of God's forſaking men, nor are they any ſins in him that ſeriouſly ſtrives and prays againſt them, but only unhappineſs and afflictions; afflictions of the ſame nature, that ſickneſs and worldly croſſes are; for even theſe the Devil may ſometimes be permitted, for wiſe and good ends,

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to bring upon us, as we have a remarkable inſtance in the caſe of Job.

But I come to our ſecond point, upon this head, which is, concerning the cure of theſe diſturbances: To this I ſay, in ſhort, that, it may be, in all perſons they are never to be cured perfectly; but ſome, ſo long as they carry their bodies about them, muſt more or leſs expect to have their virtue exerciſed with them. For I account religious melancholy, properly ſo called, is as perfect a diſeaſe, and in ſome caſes as incurable, as ſome other diſeaſes incident to human bodies; but, in moſt caſes, it is capable of a cure, and in all caſes, it may receive great comfort, and relief, and abatement. Now, in order to either, or both, of theſe ends, the beſt expedients that can be preſcribed, are theſe four following:

Firſt of all, It concerns all theſe perſons very carefully to look after their bodies; for (if what I have ſaid be true) upon the cure and health of them, the cure and health of the mind doth, in a manner, all in all depend. It will concern them to make uſe of phyſic, and exerciſe, and good company, and a regular diet, and all other things that conduce to natural health and chearfulneſs: And to avoid all things that may prejudice it; ſuch as long faſts, and watchings, and being too much alone. But to adviſe about theſe things belongs not to me, but to another profeſſion, and therefore I ſay no more about them.

Secondly, It will concern them to keep themſelves employed, as much as they can, and, if it be poſſible, to have always ſome work or buſineſs upon their hands to exerciſe their minds about. Idleneſs is the worſt thing in the world for this ſort of diſtemper, and indeed

deed thoſe that labour hard, are ſeldom troubled with it. And therefore, if theſe perſons have no affairs to take care of, (which yet few in any ſtation are without) they muſt make buſineſs for themſelves. But then there is one ſort of buſineſs that they ought to be ſeriouſly cautioned againſt, and that is, the too long, or too intenſe application of their minds to their ſpiritual exerciſe; ſuch as reading, meditation, and the like. For, tho' theſe employments, above all others, are to be recommended to perſons that have health and leiſure, yet to ſuch as are in their condition, they often do more hurt than good.

Thirdly, Another thing that would be of ſingular uſe to theſe perſons, if they could be perſuaded to practiſe it, is this: Not to lay theſe diſturbances of their minds too much to heart. Let them not be ſo grievouſly concerned, when they cannot govern their own thoughts, as they deſire, but a thouſand ſilly or wicked fancies do impoſe themſelves upon them, whether they will or no: On the contrary, let them neglect them, let them deſpiſe them, and not think themſelves the worſe, upon account of them: It is their eagerneſs to prevent, or ſtop this ſort of fancies, and their immoderate trouble for them afterwards, that is one of the moſt effectual means to excite and perpetuate them: Whereas, if they would make no great matter of them, but let them go out, as they came in, without being concerned about them, in all probability, with a little degree of health, they would vaniſh and die: And they that now complain ſo much upon that account, would have as much peace in their own minds, as other men.

But,

But, fourthly and laſtly, There is one thing more to be recommended to theſe perſons, and then I have done, and that is this: Let them never omit any known duty, either to God or their neighbours, upon account of theſe ſuggeſtions, how violent or how troubleſome ſoever they be: Let them never leave off ſaying their prayers, at the accuſtomed times, or receiving the holy ſacrament, or doing any other duty, that the law of Chriſt hath tied upon them. And though, upon theſe occaſions, above all others, they are moſt diſtracted by theſe ungovernable fancies, yet, for all that, let them go on; and, how little ſoever they pleaſe themſelves in theſe duties, or how unfit ſoever they take themſelves to be to engage in them, yet let them aſſure themſelves, that God is as much pleaſed with them, when they do thoſe duties out of conſcience, and becauſe they think they are bound ſo to do, (tho' it be with much infirmity, and a very ſhatter'd diſtracted mind) as if they had ſatisfied themſelves never ſo much in the performance of them.

This I ſay, and I conclude with it: So long as we bear an honeſt mind towards God, ſo long as we do not prevaricate with him, and wilfully depart from the known rules of our duty; but endeavour ſincerely in all our actions to obey his laws; he will accept us, nay, he will reward us, be the diſadvantages we labour under never ſo great. And, though we cannot pleaſe ourſelves, we ſhall pleaſe him; nay, (as I had occaſion to ſay in one of my former diſcourſes) he will be better pleaſed with us, for doing our duty under theſe diſcouraging circumſtances, than if, being free from theſe incumbrances, we had done it with more pleaſure to ourſelves. And, if the Devil was really as

buſy about us, as ſome of us fanſy him to be, nay, tho' all the powers of hell ſhould ſet themſelves againſt us, yet, ſo long as we thus walk, God will protect us. And, if ſometimes he doth not, ſo ſoon as we deſire, remove our afflictions, yet he will give us grace and ſtrength to bear them, and, after that, reward us for them, by increaſing our glory in the next world, in proportion to the difficulty we had to ſtruggle with, in his ſervice, in this.

And this is all I have to ſay upon this argument.

SER-

SERMON VI.

Concerning the Fewneſs of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved; and about Predeſtination from all eternity.

LUKE XIII. 23.

Then ſaid one unto him, Lord, are there few that ſhall be ſaved? And he ſaid unto them, ſtrive to enter in at the ſtreight gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

IN purſuance of the argument I have been lately diſcourſing of in another place, and which I told you I would go on with as I had opportunity; I mean to treat now of two other things, (different from thoſe I then ſpoke to) and which are often the occaſion of great diſturbances to the minds of ſome melancholy people among us; and for that purpoſe I have now pitched upon the words I have read unto you.

As

As for thoſe that out of curioſity deſire to be ſatisfied about the point here propoſed to our Saviour, concerning the fewneſs of the ſaved, (which ſeems to have been the temper of thoſe that aſked this queſtion in my text) they ought to have no other anſwer than what our Saviour here gives: Which indeed is not a direct anſwer to the queſtion, but good advice to the propoſer of it. When one ſaid unto him, *Lord, are there few that ſhall be ſaved?* Jeſus anſwered, *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtreight gate; for many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* By which words he doth not declare whether few or many ſhall enter into life; but he ſeriouſly addreſſeth himſelf to him that made the queſtion, and the reſt of the company, that they ſhould take care to be found in the number of thoſe that ſhould; for this did infinitely concern them. But it did not at all concern them to know how few, or how many ſhould be ſaved.

This, undubtedly, is the deſign of our Saviour's reply; but yet, it is often interpreted to other purpoſes.

Our Saviour, as ſome are apt to think, doth not ſo much intend by theſe words to repreſent the great neceſſity there is that we ſhould all take pains, and ſtrive, and labour to approve ourſelves his chearful diſciples, and by that means to ſave our own ſouls, (which is that I have now ſaid to be his deſign) as to declare to his hearers the fewneſs of thoſe that, after all their pains, and labour, and ſolicitude about their everlaſting ſalvation, ſhall attain to it; and they gather from theſe words of his theſe two doctrines:

Firſt, That the number of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved, is exceeding ſmall.

Secondly,

Secondly, That a great many may ſtrive, and take pains to go to heaven, and yet ſhall fail of their ends at laſt; not ſo much for the want of ſincerity, as becauſe they are not in the number of thoſe that God has decreed to be ſaved.

Such concluſions as theſe, very well-meaning people are apt to draw from this text, and ſome others: And, in truth, the uſe they make of them is no way to their own advantage; for they make ſuch application of them to themſelves, as renders their lives very uncomfortable, by filling them with frights and diſmal apprehenſions concerning their own condition, though otherwiſe they be never ſo deſirous and ſtudious to recommend themſelves to God, by an innocent and devout life.

The truth is, among all the troubleſome reflections that are apt to fall into the minds of devout people, (eſpecially if they have any doſe of melancholy in their conſtitutions) there is nothing that more diſturbs them, nothing that more hinders them from the enjoyment of themſelves, or more diſcourages them from a vigorous and chearful proſecution of a holy life, than theſe two thoughts: Firſt, The extreme fewneſs of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved. Secondly, The uncertainty they are in, whether they be in the number of thoſe that are elected to ſalvation.

I think therefore it may do ſome ſervice to diſcourſe a little upon theſe two points, and to open this text, and two or three more which relate to this buſineſs, being confident that if they be put into their true light, they will not cauſe frightful ideas to melancholy perſons among us, as they ſometimes do.

But in attempting this, I would not have any of you think that I am going to confute theſe two doctrines upon which theſe melancholy fancies are grounded. I would not have you think that I am going to prove that among the maſs of mankind there is a greater number that ſhall be ſaved, than ſhall be damned; or that ſome people may be ſaved, though they be not elected of God to ſalvation from eternity. No, theſe are things that never entered into my head, and I ſhould be loth to give ſuch a bad example to others, as I muſt needs do, if I ſhould pretend to meddle with ſuch points as theſe in the pulpit.

My buſineſs is only this, to offer ſuch conſiderations to tender and afflicted ſpirits, about theſe two points, that may convince them that they have no reaſon to draw from hence ſuch melancholy inferences as they are wont to do: That theſe points do not in truth much concern them; but they may, and ought to live chearfully and comfortably, and to go on vigorouſly in the ways of virtue, not doubting of God's favour and mercy to them, notwithſtanding the fewneſs of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved, and notwithſtanding the uncertainty they are in, of their particular election from eternity.

I begin with the firſt of theſe points: The fewneſs of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved. The ſcripture tells us, *That Chriſt's flock is but a little flock*; and our Saviour here, *Strive to enter in at the ſtreight gate; for many ſhall ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able:* And in another place he tells us, *That wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to deſtruction, and many there be that enter in thereat; but ſtreight is the gate*, &c. Nay, ſo few are theſe that find this gate, that (as one

one not long ago in print hath been bold to compute the matter) where one of mankind enters into it, a million perhaps go the other way.

To this I ſay, Firſt, let the number of thoſe that ſhall be miſerable, as much exceed the number of the ſaints as can be well ſuppoſed, yet it ought not much to concern thoſe among us that are apteſt to be troubled at it, if they only look at themſelves. Becauſe whatſoever comes of the reſt of the world, they may be in a ſafe condition, and be pretty well aſſured of it. The ground, I ſuppoſe, upon which men make ſuch a computation of the comparative fewneſs of the ſaved is this, that none are ſuppoſed to be in a ſalvable condition, but thoſe that are believers and profeſſors of the true religion; which, in compariſon of thoſe that do not believe and profeſs it, have always been, and ſtill are, exceeding few. Till the times of our Saviour, the whole world lay in darkneſs and ignorance, and horrible idolatry, except only the Jews, who were a handful of men. And for ſome years after our Saviour, how very thin-ſpread were the chriſtians? And even at this day, when chriſtianity is become the religion of many nations, yet three parts of the world, (as it is probably computed) are infidels and unbelievers. So large a ſpread hath judaiſm, mahometiſm, and paganiſm, ſtill in the world: and even of that fourth part which owns Chriſt's religion, yet much the greateſt part of that lies covered with error and ſuperſtition, ſo that the true believers, the true church of Chriſt, and conſequently thoſe that ſhall be ſaved, lie but in a very little compaſs.

This, I preſume, is the ground upon which they proceed that make the number of the ſaved to be ſo

very ſmall. But though this be a very uncomfortable reckoning to far the greateſt part of mankind, yet to us here, who know ourſelves to have the true goſpel among us, and to be in the right way to ſalvation, it is not ſo uncomfortable, if we look only at ourſelves. Here is no diſcouragement at all to the hopes of our ſalvation, but only to the hopes of theirs that are not in ſuch happy circumſtances. We are God's people, and may be aſſured we are ſo, whatever becomes of thoſe that are without.

But it will be ſaid, that even among us that are true believers, and orthodox in our principles, yet it is to be feared, that far the greateſt part ſhall finally miſcarry, and therefore (ſaith a ſuperſtitious perſon) how know I, but that it may be my lot amongſt the reſt? But to this I anſwer: Suppoſe it to be ſo that the greateſt part of profeſſors do miſcarry, what is the reaſon of it? Is it not becauſe the greateſt part do not walk up to the principles of religion, but are careleſs, and looſe, and vicious in their lives? Sure it is. And if ſo, how can this be any diſcouragement to you, who are careful to frame your lives according to your principles; who do not only profeſs the true religion, but endeavour to adorn it by a holy converſation? The conſideration of the many that take the broad way, and periſh in it, ought indeed to be an argument to you, to be very careful of your ſteps; but it doth not at all render your condition more doubtful, or more hazardous, if you have already choſen the ſtreight gate that leadeth to life. If indeed heaven and eternal happineſs was diſpoſed to mankind, in the way of a lottery, in which, where one draws a prize, a thouſand meet with blanks, (tho' yet, they that are diſappointed,

pointed, uſe the ſame care and induſtry that thoſe do who ſucceed) I ſay, if this was the caſe of mankind, with reference to the other world, it would make the ſtouteſt of us all to tremble at the apprehenſions of what might be our deſtiny.

But, God be thanked, it is not ſo; tho' the number of thoſe that periſh ſhould be much greater than of thoſe that are proſperous, yet none ever did, or ever ſhall periſh, but through his own fault and careleſſneſs. And as for thoſe that take care of their ſouls, and uſe thoſe means that God hath vouchſafed them (how few ſoever theſe be) they ſhall certainly obtain ſalvation, and may be as much aſſured of it, as if the number of the ſaved were as great, as they now eſteem it ſmall.

So that this conſideration of the multitude that miſcarry, cannot, to a reaſonable man, render the hopes of his own happineſs in the leaſt more doubtful.

This is the firſt thing. Ay, but it may be ſaid, tho' it do not render his own happineſs ſuſpected, yet ſtill it is a melancholy conſideration to think what ſhall become of far the greateſt part of the world. Where is the infinite goodneſs of God, which we ſo much extol, when of all thoſe creatures that he hath made, ſo ſmall a handful are deſigned for happineſs, and all the reſt are concluded in a ſtate, far worſe than if they had never been born?

To this I anſwer, in the ſecond place; Let us not meaſure the infinite goodneſs of God by the events that come upon the people of this earth, which is but a little part of the vaſt creation, and perhaps the very worſt part of it. Tho' here we ſee the bad to exceed the good in number, and conſequently the miſerable

to be many more than the happy, yet it may be quite otherwiſe in thoſe infinite, ſpacious, and glorious regions above, which God fills with his preſence. We mortals are but a very little, inconſiderable part of the great family of God. *In our Father's houſe are many manſions* (as our Saviour tells us) *all which may be filled with bleſſed and happy beings, that live up to the end of their creation, and ceaſe not to glorify him that made them.* So that let things go here as ill as we can imagine, yet for all that it is to be hoped, that as full as earth and hell are of devils and evil men, heaven is much, exceedingly much fuller of angels and perfect ſpirits.

But, thirdly, to come home to the point. How are we certain that the ſtate of this earth is ſo bad as ſome melancholy perſons would repreſent it? What reaſon have we to conclude, that the number of the ſaved is ſo extremely ſmall, as ſome narrow-ſpirited chriſtians would have it believed? Why may it not be quite otherwiſe? For my part, I would be ſo far from confining the mercies of God to a few of this or the other particular ſect or party, that I would rather ſay and believe with the holy pſalmiſt, *That he hath ſpread out his tender mercies over all his works.* I ſhould think that man both immodeſt and raſh, that ſhould paſs a ſentence of damnation even upon all Jews, or Turks, or heathens; much more upon all his fellow chriſtians, tho' they be not ſo good as he; or, tho' they have the misfortune to be of a different perſuaſion or communion from him.

God, in the ſcripture, hath paſſed no ſentence upon theſe people, and therefore why ſhould we? St. Paul, that was an apoſtle of our Lord's, yet ſaith, *What have*

I to do to judge them that are without? And therefore much less have we to do to judge them. It is true we have no explicit promise from God of happiness and salvation to any, but thro' faith in Jesus Christ: But doth it therefore follow, that because we cannot assuredly pronounce them happy, that do not believe in Christ, (and therefore perhaps do not believe in him, because the gospel was never preached to them; I say, doth it therefore follow, that) we must give them up to damnation? No, it will better become us to leave them to the general, uncovenanted, unpromised mercies of God, and to say nothing of them. His servants they are, and to him, their master, they stand or fall; and if we may not judge those that are infidels, how much less will it become us to judge those that believe the same faith in general that we do, tho' perhaps with a great mixture of errors, and superstition, and corrupt practices? But and if we will judge them, God, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things, may pass a judgment quite different from ours. Many of those, whom we distinguish from ourselves by very hard names; many of those whom we may look upon as mere moral men, as ignorant of the true soul-saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, nay, as profane, or hypocritical, or superstitious, or idolatrous, may, thro' the merits of Jesus, and a general repentance of all their sins known and unknown, find mercy at the hands of God at the last day.

Let us therefore judge nothing before the time; let us rather hope the best of all men. Charity, I am sure, (if the apostle's description of it be true) will incline us so to do, and it may be, in so doing, we shall think truer than if we did otherwise.

In all probability, the number of God's people in this world is much greater than is ordinarily thought, and many will find acceptance with God (the ſearcher of hearts) in the other world, who were hardly thought on by men in this.

The prophet Elias, in the 19th chapter of the firſt of Kings, thus complains to God: *Behold, the children of Iſrael have forſaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and ſlain thy prophets with the ſword: And I, even I only, am left, and they ſeek my life to take it away.* What now is God's anſwer to him? *Yet* (ſaith he) *have I left me ſeven thouſand men in Iſrael that have not bowed the knee to Baal.* Elias thought he was left alone, but God knew that he had ſeven thouſand ſervants beſide him; and ſo we may hope it will be in all places, and at all times.

Let us not therefore fright ourſelves with theſe diſmal apprehenſions: The kingdom of God, it is to be hoped, is much larger than we take it to be, and the condition of mankind is not ſo deplorable as our bigotted melancholy fancies may ſuggeſt to us. And even as for thoſe that ſhall be found reprobate at the laſt day, (how many ſoever they prove to be) yet when the proceedings of God with mankind come to be manifeſted and laid open, (as they then ſhall be to the whole world) we ſhall be ſo far from complaining of the ſeverity of God's dealing even with them, that we ſhall have reaſon to magnify, not only the equity of his juſtice, but his goodneſs and mercy likewiſe.

But then, fourthly and laſtly, as for theſe texts of ſcripture that are produced in favour of this opinion, of the extreme fewneſs of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved, if

they

they be examined, they will appear to relate quite to another purpoſe.

Chriſt doth indeed call his diſciples a little flock; *Fear not* (ſaith he) *little flock, for it is your Father's good pleaſure to give you the kingdom*, Luke xii. 32. But what if by the kingdom here be not meant the kingdom of heaven, but Chriſt's kingdom here in this world? So that the ſenſe is this, *Fear not little flock*, tho' you now be a very ſmall company, and unlikely to grapple with all that oppoſition that the devil and the world will raiſe againſt you, yet be not for this diſcouraged: this religion of mine, which you now profeſs, ſhall get ſuch ground in the world, as in due time to be advanced into the thrones of princes. You chriſtians, as inconſiderable as you now are, ſhall at laſt poſſeſs the kingdom; as they actually did.

But ſuppoſe we interpret the kingdom of God here of the kingdom of heaven, yet it doth not make much for the purpoſe that melancholy perſons apply it to; tho' Chriſt's flock was a little flock then, (becauſe he had but juſt begun to gather it) yet it is not ſo little a flock now; it is, God be thanked, vaſtly increaſed, in compariſon of it then, when our Saviour ſpoke theſe words. And tho' ſtill it cannot be denied but that it is a little flock, in compariſon of the great numbers of people that are not yet come into the fold, yet a time may come when they alſo ſhall be brought in, and when all the kingdoms of the world ſhall become the kingdoms of our Lord Jeſus, and the knowledge of the Lord ſhall cover the earth, as the waters cover the ſea, as the old prophet hath foretold. And when this comes to paſs, then will this ſaying of our Savi-

our's be fulfilled to the utmoſt, even in the firſt ſenſe I gave of the kingdom.

As for the other text I mentioned, in the ſeventh of Matth. where our Saviour tells us, *That ſtreight is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to deſtruction, and many there be that go in thereat:* By the gate here that leadeth to life, is undoubtedly to be underſtood the taking upon us the chriſtian religion, and framing our lives according to it, which is the only way to which God hath promiſed ſalvation. Now this courſe of life, in compariſon to the way of the world, the way of vice, and ſenſuality, and wickedneſs, which is the gate that leads to deſtruction, is both ſtreight and narrow, that is to ſay, is both ſtrict and difficult.

But then there are theſe two things to be remembered: Firſt, That this maketh nothing to the diſcouragement of thoſe that have already entered this ſtreight gate, and are already chriſtians, of which there are vaſt numbers all over the world, as it is to be hoped, tho' not ſo many as thoſe that are in the broad way, the way of the world.

But, ſecondly, Tho' this gate of chriſtianity, and which is the only paſſage unto life, be always ſtreight and narrow, that is, requires great ſtrictneſs, and is attended with ſome difficulties, yet it is not ſo ſtreight now by a great deal as it was, when our Saviour ſpoke theſe words; it was then extremely ſtreight, by reaſon of the many oppoſitions and perſecutions, and worldly terrors, which both hindered men from entring into it, and which attended the courſe of all them that had already undertaken it. But, God be thanked,

it is not now so streight in this sense to us, but wide enough in all reason; for we have met with no worldly or outward discouragements in the way of our christianity; at least, generally speaking, we have not, and we hope we never shall. On the contrary, we may truly say, as things, by the mercy of God stand among us, that in point of worldly motives and considerations, in point of ease and pleasure, and temporal advantages, a man hath as much encouragement to be good as to be bad; to live a holy and a christian life, as to live a dissolute and prophane one; so that the case of christianity being so much altered from what it was when our Saviour first preached it, these words of his cannot be so properly urged for the purpose they are brought for.

But there is a third passage of our Saviour, which seems to make more for this purpose than either of the other; and that is the text I am now upon; and therefore (tho' I have spoken something to it already) yet I shall now give a more particular account of it.

Our Saviour is here put upon speaking to that very point we are now discoursing of: *One said unto him, Lord, are there few that shall be saved?* This was the question. Our Saviour's answer to this question was this; *Strive to enter in at the streight gate, for many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able.* Now as to this, I say, far be it from us to understand this answer of our Saviour's in the sense that some persons would have it taken in; namely, that hereby he intimates that they are but exceeding few that shall be saved, and that many shall earnestly apply themselves, and industriously seek to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and yet, notwithstanding all their pains and endeavours

shall

ſhall fall ſhort of it. If this indeed was the meaning of our Saviour, it would be one of the moſt uncomfortable texts in the whole ſcripture. But, without queſtion, there is no ſuch thing here intimated, as will appear to any that will ſtrictly examine the paſſage. The caſe is this: One that was more curious than ſerious, aſks him concerning the ſucceſs of his doctrine in the world: Whether many or few would embrace it, and ſo by the means thereof obtain eternal ſalvation. This is the meaning of the queſtion. What now, ſaith our Saviour to this? Doth he give a direct anſwer to the queſtion? No, not at all; he neither tells whether many, or whether few ſhould be ſaved. But, as his manner was, when he was aſked queſtions that had more of curioſity in them, than any tendency to benefit the aſkers, inſtead of directly anſwering the queſtion propoſed, he takes occaſion from thence of giving good advice and counſel to the hearers; and thus he doth here. Jeſus ſaith unto him, *Strive to enter in at the ſtreight gate; for many ſhall ſeek to enter, and ſhall not be able*; as if he had ſaid, be not you ſo curious to enquire into the number of thoſe that ſhall embrace my doctrine, and be ſaved by it, but rather take you care that you yourſelves be found in that number. I will aſſure you, the thing itſelf will oblige you to it; for, as the world now ſtands, ſtreight is the gate of chriſtianity, by which you are to enter into life; ſo ſtreight, that it will require not only great ſincerity, but great earneſtneſs and vehemence, in whoever undertakes it; which is a great deal more than a careleſs wiſh, or a ſlight deſire and endeavour. He that will go to heaven in the way that I propoſe, muſt ſtrive heartily, and not ſeek faintly; muſt ἀγωνίζεσθαι, (that

(that is the word our Saviour here uſeth) that is to ſay, he muſt do as thoſe that run a race, or engage themſelves in any other ſtrife for maſtery; he muſt put out his whole ſtrength, bend the whole force both of his body and mind to the work he is about; otherwiſe he may miſcarry. A faint ſeeking will hardly do the work. Many of thoſe that have ſome will or deſire to enter in at this gate, and to be my diſciples, when they come to ſee what temporal advantages they muſt part with, and what hardſhips they muſt endure for my name's ſake, will not be able to enter, will not be able to give up themſelves to my religion. It is the ſtrivers only, thoſe that will take the kingdom of heaven by violence, that will be ſucceſsful. *Strive to enter in at the ſtreight gate; for many ſhall ſeek to enter, and ſhall not be able.* It is not here ſaid, many ſhall ſtrive to enter, and ſhall not be able; no, none ever ſtrove to enter, but they did it: But it is the ſeekers only that ſhall not be able, that is to ſay, thoſe that have ſome good-will towards Chriſt's religion, but have not ſincerity or courage enough to proſecute it with diligence and vigour.

And this, I hope, is ſufficient to ſatisfy thoſe that are uneaſy and doubtful of their own condition, upon account of the fewneſs of thoſe that are to be ſaved; which was the firſt point I was to diſcourſe on.

But, may ſome ſay ſtill, there is as great a difficulty behind: what is all this to me, unleſs I had ſome aſſurance that I am one of thoſe that are appointed, and ordained, and elected by God to ſalvation? If God hath from all eternity pitched upon ſuch a determinate number of men, whom he deſigns to make veſſels of honour, and all the reſt of mankind, who are not thus

elected,

elected, ſhall certainly periſh, what comfort can I have, unleſs I knew I was one of thoſe that are thus predeſtinated to life? For any thing I know, I may be one of thoſe that are from all eternity doomed to deſtruction.

This is the ſecond point I am to diſcourſe of, and I ſhall do it very briefly, and very plainly. And in anſwer to this ſort of ſcruple, I ſay, in the firſt place, That it is the moſt unreaſonable thing in the world (however men have got it into their heads) to trouble ourſelves about the eternal decrees of God; which being infinitely above our underſtanding, muſt therefore certainly be much beyond our duty to enquire after. That which we have to do, is to look into the revealed will of God, which is contained in the holy ſcriptures; for from hence, and hence only, we can with any certainty make a judgment of our own condition, whether it be good or bad. Whatever general promiſes we there find God hath made to mankind by Jeſus Chriſt, thoſe we not only ſafely may, but we ought to apply to ourſelves in particular, ſo far as we perform the conditions of them; and ſo, on the other hand, whatever threatenings God hath there denounced againſt diſobedient and impenitent ſinners, we are to look upon ourſelves as obnoxious to them, if we do not prevent our ruin, by repentance and obedience.

This is the method that God hath appointed for the coming to a true knowledge of our own ſtate, and the raiſing comfort to ourſelves; and not the curious prying into the books of God's eternal decrees, which are altogether ſecret to us. If I would have peace of conſcience, and a comfortable aſſurance of my own

good

good condition, the way to come by it is not this, to get ſatisfied in the firſt place, that I am one of thoſe perſons whom God from all eternity did peremptorily decree ſhould be ſaved, and who conſequently cannot poſſibly miſcarry; no, this is a prepoſterous way: The true method is this; I find in the goſpel many general promiſes and declarations of God's kindneſs to mankind; as thus for inſtance, from the mouth of our Saviour; *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life.* My buſineſs is now to enquire, whether I do truly believe in Jeſus Chriſt, which I am to come to the knowledge of, by an examination of my own heart, and life, and converſation. If now, upon ſuch examination, I find, that I have all the qualifications of a true believer, I may with confidence apply this general promiſe to myſelf in particular, and raiſe this concluſion to myſelf, that ſince I find I do believe in the only begotten Son of God, aſſuredly God doth accept me; and if I continue in this eſtate till my life's end, I ſhall not periſh, but have everlaſting life.

Let us but ſatisfy ourſelves that we perform the conditions which Chriſt hath required of mankind, in order to ſalvation, (which conditions are all ſumm'd up in theſe two words, faith and repentance) and we may be as certainly aſſured that we belong to God, and are intitled to his favour, as if we ſaw our particular names recorded in a book, among them that are appointed to ſalvation.

Away therefore with all fears and doubts concerning our eternal predeſtination. Let us never be ſolicitous in enquiring, whether God hath decreed ſuch a particular

particular number of perſons (in excluſion to the reſt of mankind) to eternal life; or, if he hath done ſo, whether we be in the number of them; but let us take care to ſecure our own duty. *Secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed, to us, and to our children, that we may do all the works of his law*; as we have it in Deuteronomy. Let us take care to obey God's commandments: Let us live as well as we can, and if we do ſo, it is certain we cannot miſcarry; and if God hath made any ſuch eternal decrees concerning the lot of particular perſons, it is certain likewiſe that we are in the number of thoſe that are predeſtinated to eternal ſalvation, provided we continue in our faith and obedience.

But, ſecondly, Let me add this further upon this head, and I conclude. What if there be really no ſuch grounds for thoſe fears and doubts concerning our own ſtate, from the decrees of God, as the objection ſuppoſeth? What if the doctrine, upon which they are built, be altogether without foundation? Theſe fears I am ſpeaking of, do proceed from this ſuppoſition, that there are a determined number of men elected from all eternity to ſalvation, and that all the reſt are doomed to deſtruction.

As for the former part of this ſuppoſition, I do not now make any queſtion of it; but as to the latter part, I juſtly may and do. Nay, if by God's predeſtinating men to deſtruction, be meant his decreeing men from eternity to hell-fire, without reſpect to their evil actions, or wicked lives, (as it muſt be meant in the objection, otherwiſe it is not to the purpoſe) I ſay, the doctrine is certainly falſe: God never paſſed any ſuch ſentence upon any of his creatures. Whatever

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the ſenſe be of God's electing ſome, and paſſing by others, which I ſhall not here enquire into, theſe two things I dare confidently lay down for truth, becauſe the ſcripture, in very many plain texts, doth warrant me ſo to do: The firſt is, that as Chriſt died for all mankind, ſo all mankind that do believe in Chriſt, and profeſs his religion, (for as for thoſe that are out of the pale of the church, I have nothing to do with them; I ſay all ſuch) are in a capacity of being ſaved. God is ſo far from putting a bar to the ſalvation of any, by any eternal, abſolute, irreſpective decrees of his, that he deſigned mercy to them all without exception, and it is in their power, by the grace of God both preventing and aſſiſting, that goes along with them, to accept of that mercy; and if they do ſo, they ſhall without fail attain everlaſting life.

The ſecond thing is this; whatever God's decrees are concerning men, it is certain, no man ever was, or ever ſhall be damned, but it was, or ſhall be, purely thro' his own fault. And he might have avoided the damnation, if he would have taken that care of himſelf that in point of prudence and ſelf-preſervation he ſhould have done, and which, in other caſes, he ſometimes doth not fail to do.

If now theſe two things be true, as they may be evidently proved from the holy ſcriptures, what little grounds has any man living to be troubled about God's decrees concerning him, ſince he may be aſſured that he ſhall never miſcarry, but through his own fault; and that it is in his power, if he will make uſe of that grace which God affords him to prevent miſcarrying, and to attain to everlaſting ſalvation? And what can any reaſonable man deſire more than this?

I know that there are a great many that do not love to hear of any thing to be done on their parts, but would have all God's dealings with mankind to be ſo intirely reſolved into his uncontroulable power, as that whoever is ſaved, is to be ſaved by his irreſiſtible grace, without any concurrence of their own. But ſure I am, this notion of God's bringing men to happineſs, neither ſuits with the holy ſcriptures, nor with the nature he hath given to mankind. We readily grant, and it is certainly true, that all that comes to paſs in this world, doth come to paſs according to the counſel of God's will: But then it is as true, that God hath decreed and determined all things ſo as to give a full ſcope to the exerciſe of that power and liberty that he hath in our creation beſtowed upon us. He hath ſo made his decrees, as that it is from eternity, a fixed unmoveable point, that mankind, who by their nature are free agents, ſhould in the next world be happy or miſerable, only by their own choice. God determined in the beginning, to ſet life and death before us, by our Lord Jeſus Chriſt (and accordingly he hath done ſo); he decreed likewiſe from all eternity, that all of us that choſe life upon thoſe terms and conditions that Chriſt hath propoſed it, ſhould certainly enjoy it. He hath likewiſe given every one of us power and ability ſufficient to chuſe that life, and to make good thoſe terms and conditions; and whatever man or woman among us does do that, that perſon is certainly elected; and whoever doth otherwiſe, is certainly, by the decrees of God, a reprobate; that is to ſay, he having rejected God's grace, God will reject him at the laſt day.

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This now is all that we can, concluſively and poſitively pronounce concerning God's decrees, and thus much we may pronounce; and this is enough, both to ſatisfy our ſcruples, and to excite our induſtry. It is certain by God's word, that every one of us may be ſaved, nay, ſhall be ſaved everlaſtingly, if we be ſincere in our endeavours after it. I do not ſay, if we do all that we can do towards the obtaining ſalvation, for that perhaps no man doth; but if we be ſincere in that degree, that the infirmity and degeneracy of human nature will ordinarily allow us: if we uſe the ſame ſincerity and induſtry, in recommending ourſelves to God, and our Lord Jeſus, and procuring our own everlaſting ſalvation, that men ordinarily and cuſtomarily do, in proſecuting any great affair in the world, that they have ſet their hearts upon: I ſay, whoſoever is thus far ſincere as to his ſpiritual concernments, ſhall undoubtedly go to heaven. And ſure this is enough, abundantly enough to ſilence all the doubts, and fears, and perplexities of the moſt timorous perſons for ever. I hope they themſelves do not deſire to go to heaven upon eaſier terms; or if they do, they are very unreaſonable. And, on the other hand, if we are not thus ſerious in our endeavours to lead a holy and chriſtian life, all our other pretences to ſalvation will ſignify nothing; it will be in vain to rely upon any other election than that which is made ſure by a lively faith, and a virtuous converſation. We are all of us the elect of God, if we live as becomes the diſciples of Chriſt Jeſus; but we ſhall all be found reprobates, if we do not.

O what a ſpur is here to our induſtry! How careful ſhould we be not to rely upon a barren ineffectual faith,

faith, but to adorn our profeſſion by a godly and religious life! How diligent ſhould we be to make our calling and election ſure, by adding to our faith virtue, and to our virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godlineſs, and to godlineſs brotherly kindneſs, and to brotherly kindneſs charity! Knowing that if theſe things be in us, and abound, we ſhall never be barren nor unfruitful in the work of the Lord; but an entrance will be adminiſtered unto us more abundantly, into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord Jeſus.

I conclude all, with that memorable ſaying of St. Paul in the ſecond of the Romans, the 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 verſes; all which makes to our purpoſe: *God will render to every man according to his works; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh, upon every ſoul of man that doth evil, of the Jew firſt, and alſo of the gentile. But glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew firſt, and alſo to the gentile; for there is no reſpect of perſons with God.*

May God Almighty give us all grace ſo to behave ourſelves in this world, that we may in the other receive thoſe glorious rewards, which our Lord Jeſus hath promiſed to all his faithful diſciples. This God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

SER-

SERMON VII.

Of Faith, when true, saving, and justifying.

ACTS XVI. 31.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

YOU may remember, that I have not long ago preached several sermons about religious trouble of mind, and I then made it my business to give an account of sundry points, which, through their not being well understood, had a great influence, if not in causing, yet in the increasing that sort of affliction. And I told you that, as I had opportunity, I would go on with this argument, and speak to some other points which often prove the occasion of many frights and doubts to timorous and melancholy persons. Having therefore an opportunity now given me, I mean to proceed where I left off.

Five causes of religious trouble, which arise from the misapprehension of things, I have already spoken to; that is to say;

First,

First, The opinion men have taken up about desertion, or God's forsaking them.

Secondly, The loss of their spiritual comfort, and the dulness and deadness of their hearts, as to all religious duties.

Thirdly, The being haunted with wicked and blasphemous thoughts.

Fourthly, The extreme fewness of those that shall be saved.

Fifthly, The uncertainty they are in, as to their particular election to salvation.

I now come to consider two other things, which some melancholy people do often complain of, and which causeth them as much uneasiness as any other points I have named: And that is, in the sixth place, their want of faith; and in the seventh place, their not being truly penitent for their sins.

Faith and repentance, they know very well, are the great gospel duties, and indeed the only conditions required to salvation. And if they want either of these, in what a miserable condition are they? But yet as things stand with them, they have neither true faith, nor true repentance.

These two things, I say, I shall now endeavour to give some satisfaction about, by putting both these duties in a fair light, and shewing that good peoples uneasinesses and frights about them, are occasioned purely by their not rightly understanding the nature of them.

I begin with faith, to which I shall at this time confine my discourse. The general description of that faith, whereby christians are to be saved, is given us in these words of St. Paul I have now read

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unto you. When the goaler, in the verse before, had earnestly desired Paul and Silas to instruct him in the way of salvation, saying, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* The answer they return to him is, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house*; so that saving, justifying faith is to believe on the Lord Jesus.

Well but, say they whose cases we are speaking to, this is our misery, we do not believe on the Lord Jesus; on the contrary, we are sorely troubled with unbelief. If you ask them what reason they have to think so, do they not believe the gospel, do they not own our Lord Jesus to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world? Yes, they will tell you they do so; but yet for all that, they want faith; because they are full of doubts concerning their condition; now is not doubting contrary to faith? What is it, say they, to believe on the Lord Jesus, but to believe that the Lord Jesus is my Saviour, that his righteousness is my righteousness, and that I am one of those for whom he purchased eternal salvation? But they cannot bring themselves to a firm belief of this; they cannot thus apply Christ's benefits to themselves in particular. Is it not one of the articles which every christian doth daily profess; namely, that he believes the forgiveness of sins? Why, they cannot say this; they do not heartily and stedfastly believe the forgiveness of their sins; and therefore sure they want something necessary to saving faith.

This is the case, and this I shall now particularly apply myself to; and the rather, because I believe this is a notion of faith very common among us; nay,

nay, I am afraid it is to be met with in some of our catechisms and systems of divinity.

And here my business shall be to speak of these two points:

First, Whether it be necessary to saving faith, to believe that my sins are forgiven me, or to make such an application of Christ's righteousness to myself, as from hence to be able to conclude, that I in particular am righteous by his righteousness, and consequently shall be saved by him; or, which comes to the same thing, whether the doubting of this be the sin of unbelief?

And secondly, What is the true notion of that faith which is in scripture required, as a condition of mens justification and salvation? The resolving these two inquiries is all that can be thought needful, in order to the clearing up all difficulties in this matter.

I begin with the first inquiry. Whether it be of the essence of saving faith to believe that my sins are forgiven me; or to apply Christ's righteousness so particularly to myself, as to believe that I am thereby a justified person?

Those persons, whose case I am now speaking to, and likewise a great many others among us, do verily think that this is necessary to the having true faith, and that to doubt of it, is the sin of unbelief. But now, if upon examination it proves to be otherwise, then I suppose they will be easily convinced that there was no ground for their fears and perplexities about this matter; for they may have true faith, how great soever their doubts may be of the forgiveness of their sins.

Now what I have to say as to this point, I shall represent in these four following particulars: First of all,

all, let it be conſidered, that it cannot be neceſſary to the having true faith, to believe that which God hath no where revealed. For when we ſpeak of faith in a theological ſenſe, (that is to ſay, as it is required of us as a duty by God) as we do all along in this diſcourſe, it can have no other object than divine revelation, and is always commenſurate with that; nor can it extend farther than that goes. So that whatever God hath revealed, that is an object of our faith, and we are bound to believe it: Whatever God hath not revealed, that is no object of our faith, nor are we concerned in point of religion, whether we believe it, or no. This now being ſo, I aſk, where is it declared in the whole ſcripture, (which takes in all the revelations of God to mankind, and makes up an intire object of our faith; I ſay, where is it there declared) that my ſins are forgiven me; or that Chriſt's righteouſneſs is ſo imputed to me, that I ſhall be ſaved eternally? And if theſe things be not there declared, and revealed, then it is certain, it can be no part of my faith to believe them; nor can it be a ſinful unbelief in me to doubt of them.

But to this it will be ſaid, tho' it be not declared in the ſcriptures, concerning particular perſons, and by name, that their ſins are forgiven them; yet all particular perſons are commanded to apply the general promiſes of Chriſt to themſelves, as much as if they had been made to them by name; and if they do not this, they are guilty of unbelief. And this is the caſe of theſe perſons I am now ſpeaking of; they do not apply the promiſes of forgiveneſs of ſins to themſelves in particular; they do not lay hold of the merits of

Chriſt, ſo as to make his righteouſneſs their righteouſneſs; and this is want of faith in them.

Well, to this I ſay, in the ſecond place. Let us at preſent admit this notion of faith, that they contend for; but then, pray ſee the conſequence. If God hath commanded all men to apply the promiſes of Chriſt to themſelves in particular; and that to do this is faith; and not to do it, unbelief; then it follows for certain, that the worſt men in the world are bound, under penalty of eternal damnation, to make ſuch an application to themſelves. They are bound, if they would not be condemned amongſt the unbelievers, to believe the remiſſion of ſins; that is, the remiſſion of their own ſins in particular. They are bound to believe, that Chriſt's righteouſneſs is as much imputed to them, as if they were righteous themſelves; I ſay, they are bound to do all this, becauſe every man is bound to have true faith in Jeſus Chriſt: And, if this be true faith in Jeſus Chriſt, then, whenever they can bring up themſelves to ſuch a pitch of confidence, as to be able thus to do, they are as true believers, and as much in the number of the faithful, as thoſe that live the moſt holy and pure lives; how careleſs, and diſſolute, and vicious ſoever their lives and converſation be. But this is ſo intolerable a conſequence, that I believe no ſober man will own it; and therefore we may from hence form an undeniable argument, that faith in Chriſt, and application of his promiſes to ourſelves, are two quite different things.

But, thirdly, to come home to the point, let it be farther conſider'd, notwithſtanding all this talk of laying hold on Chriſt's righteouſneſs, and applying his merits to ourſelves in particular; ſo as to believe that

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we are righteous through his righteousness; and that through the merits of his sufferings all our sins are actually forgiven; I say, let it be considered, that these things are so far from being a necessary ingredient in the true faith, that it doth not appear, from the scriptures, that they are so much as required of us as a duty at all, or that the not doing of them, shall be imputed to us as a sin.

The reason why I say so, is this: All the scripture-promises of forgiveness of sin, and of eternal life, through the blood of Jesus Christ, are made unto mankind under a condition that they perform the terms of the new covenant which was then sealed by that blood between God and man; which terms, as we have said, are faith and repentance. No man therefore can, or ought, to apply these promises to himself, that is, so as to think he hath a right or title to them, any farther than he can satisfy himself he hath performed those conditions: Nay, it would be an unwarrantable, sinful presumption in him, if he should offer it.

But now, if it be every man's duty, nay, or any man's duty, thus to apply the promises to himself, and a sin in him, if he did not, then it must be supposed likewise that it was his duty to believe that he hath performed the conditions. But now I desire any man to shew me any text of scripture, where God hath commanded, that we should believe that we have performed the conditions of the new covenant, or declared it to be a sin in us, if we cannot thus believe. Thus far God hath commanded us to believe; namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world; and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. But he hath no-where commanded us to believe that we

are true believers; and consequently that we shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The scripture requires us to believe, that all true penitents shall have remission of their sins, through the blood of Christ: But it no where requires us to believe, that we are true penitents, and that we shall have remission of sins. Lastly; The scripture hath told us, that if our faith be sincere, it shall be imputed to us for righteousness, as Abraham's faith was; but this is a quite different thing from laying hold of Christ's righteousness, and applying it to ourselves, and then calling it faith so to do. Since now no man is obliged, by the law of God, to believe, or to be assured, that he hath faith or repentance, or hath performed the conditions of the gospel-covenant, (as it is certain, no man is; and, indeed, in many cases, as things stand with men, it is a matter really impossible they should be thus assured) it undeniably follows, that neither is any man bound to make such an application of the promises of the gospel to himself, as this notion of faith (that I am now speaking of) supposeth; and, if such an application be not his duty, then it is certain he may have true saving faith without it.

But, may some say, ought not every man, especially every good man, to apply the promises of the gospel to himself in particular? Are they not to be the support, and the comfort, and the joy of his life?

To this I answer these two things: In one sense, every man, both good and bad, ought to apply them to himself; and, in another sense, every good man may so apply them.

First, Every man whatsoever ought to apply the promises of the gospel to himself, as they are motives and encouragements to spur him on to do his duty:

But

But then this application is but to be conditional, that is, thus; he ought to look upon all the promiſes as belonging to him, if he perform the conditions of them; he ought verily to believe, that he, in particular, ſhall be a ſharer in all the benefits that Chriſt hath purchaſed for his church, ſuppoſing that he makes good the terms on his part required in the covenant of grace. This kind of application of the promiſes is neceſſary to be made by every man, both good and bad; becauſe it is neceſſary to the doing our duty. Without ſuch an application, a man would not be put upon uſing his endeavours to attain the things promiſed; and, conſequently, the promiſes of God would loſe their end; they would not be motives to obedience.

And thus far I will readily grant, that to apply the promiſes to ourſelves, is of the eſſence of faith; and not to do it, is unbelief: For, indeed, it is a flat denying our aſſent to the revelations of God. God ſaith, in general, whoſoever believeth and repenteth, ſhall be ſaved. The man who refuſeth to make this application, muſt be ſuppoſed to contradict this; for he muſt be ſuppoſed to ſay, that he doth not believe that he himſelf ſhould be ſaved, tho' he ſhould believe and repent; which is flat unbelief.

But now, the perſons I am treating of are no ways guilty of this unbelief; for they do apply the promiſes of the goſpel to themſelves in particular, in that conditional way we now talk of. They acknowledge and believe the remiſſion of ſins in general, and the ſalvation purchaſed by Jeſus Chriſt; and they believe likewiſe, that they in particular ſhould have their portion in thoſe benefits, if they did perform the conditions. Thus far then they do apply the promiſes to themſelves:

selves: which is all that faith obligeth them to do. But here they stick; they are in doubt whether they have performed these conditions, whether their faith and repentance be such as God will accept. This is their doubt, but this is no unbelief in them: For, as I said, they ought not, they cannot, farther believe the promises to belong to them, than they can satisfy themselves they have made good the conditions.

But, secondly, besides this conditional application of promises, by way of motive and encouragement to do our duty, which every man, both good and bad, is bound to make to himself; a good man may go farther; for he may make a positive, absolute application of the promises of forgiveness and salvation to himself, to his own unspeakable comfort: That is, when he finds, by the holy frame and temper of his own heart, and the fruits of piety in his life and conversation, that he hath the qualifications of a true disciple of Christ; he may speak peace to himself, upon good grounds, and assuredly believe, that the promises of the gospel do belong to him in particular: That his sins are forgiven him; that he is actually in the favour of God; and that, if he perseveres in that course of holiness in which he now walks, he shall at last attain everlasting salvation.

But then it is to be remember'd, that these comfortable reflections and applications are not so much his duty, as his happiness; or, if you will, they are no otherwise his duty, than as it is his duty to contribute all he can to the making his life as happy and as comfortable as he can, in this world.

The plain english is, these things do not make any part of the conditions of the gospel, but only of the comfort

comfort of it; it is the happineſs of a man, that he is able to make ſuch a judgment of the ſincerity of his own pious endeavours, as to conclude from hence, that he is in God's favour, and, ſo long as he makes ſuch a judgment, he will not fail to draw ſuch a concluſion, and much comfort will he receive from it. But if, through ignorance, or miſtake, or melancholy, he be hinder'd from making ſuch a judgment of his own qualifications, as to give him confidence to believe that the promiſes belong to him: This is rather his infelicity, than his ſin; it is not want of faith, but weakneſs of judgment. And, tho' he cannot with aſſurance look upon the promiſes as belonging to him in particular, ſo long as his mind continues thus clouded; yet God Almighty, the ſearcher of hearts, knows that he hath a right to them, and will effectually make them good, to the eternal ſalvation of his ſoul, if he continue faithful to the end.

But, fourthly and laſtly: Let it be farther conſidered, that this aſſurance of our ſalvation, or this believing that our ſins are forgiven, or this applying Chriſt's merits to ourſelves, is no where in ſcripture called by the name of faith: Nor, on the other ſide, are theſe terms of faith, and believing, ever uſed in ſuch a ſenſe, as can be reaſonably interpreted to import theſe things.

Firſt, I ſay, that theſe things are never in ſcripture called by the name of faith. We meet, indeed, with thoſe things often in the New-teſtament; but they are always ſtyled by another name than that of faith. The apoſtle mentions the hope of chriſtians, and the full aſſurance of hope; and he mentions their joying in the teſtimony of a good conſcience, their peace,

and their joy in believing. In a word, we meet, in the New-teſtament, with ſeveral expreſſions of the confidence and aſſurance that good chriſtans had, or might have, of the favour of God, and the forgiveneſs of their ſins. But theſe things are no where intimated to be the ſame thing with their faith, in proper ſpeaking, but rather to be the effects and conſequences of their faith. Thoſe things are repreſented to be the comfortable fruits of their faith and believing in Jeſus Chriſt, and not to be faith or believing itſelf.

And certainly it muſt be thus: For what grounds has any man of hope, or aſſurance, that his ſins are forgiven him, or that the benefits of Chriſt's paſſion belong to him, other than this, that he is among the number of thoſe true believers to whom the promiſes are made? And, if ſo, then his hope, or his aſſurance, is not the ſame thing with his faith, or his believing, but ſomething that is conſequent from it, or bottom'd upon it.

But, farther, I ſay, theſe terms of faith, or believing, are never uſed in that ſenſe in ſcripture, in which the perſons, whoſe caſe we are now upon, do take them. In ſcripture we, indeed, often find mention made of faith in Chriſt, for the remiſſion of our ſins: But nobody is to underſtand this of the belief of the forgiveneſs of a man's own ſins in particular; but of belief in Jeſus Chriſt, by whom only remiſſion of ſins is to be obtained. St. Paul ſaith in my text, *Believe in the Lord Jeſus, and thou ſhalt be ſaved*: But his meaning is not, believe that Chriſt died for thee in particular, and thou ſhalt be ſaved: But this, believe that Jeſus Chriſt was ſent by God to be the Saviour of the world, and become a diſciple of his, and then thou

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shalt be saved. Again our Saviour saith, *Whoever believeth not, shall be damned.* But far be it from us to construe his words on this manner, that whosoever believeth not that he is one of those to whom the promises of God do belong, shall be damned: But thus the context will oblige us to expound them, that whosoever hath the gospel preached to him, and doth not believe it, and enter into the profession of it by baptism, with sincere resolutions to live according to it, such an one shall be damned.

Lastly, It is said, that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness: But this is not to be understood as if Abraham's faith was nothing but his assurance of God's favour, and his applying the promises to himself; and that this was accounted to him for righteousness. No, Abraham's faith was quite a different thing, as the apostle all along describes it. His faith consisted in believing stedfastly the revelations of God to him to be true, how improbable soever the matter of them seemed to flesh and blood: And, upon this belief, quitting his country, and friends, and disposing himself to pay intire obedience to the commands of God, tho' they were never so seemingly severe. This was that faith of his that was counted to him for righteousness; that is, upon account of which God accepted him as a righteous person. And this faith of Abraham's is always, by the apostle, represented as a pattern of our faith; the copy that we are to write after, if we expect acceptance with God.

By these several things that I have now represented, you may easily perceive how different a thing that which many persons among us call true faith, and

of the want of which ſome good people do complain, is from the faith of the goſpel, that faith which Chriſt hath propoſed as a condition of our ſalvation.

If any man be not ſatisfied with all this, but will ſtill contend that the principal act of ſaving faith, the very life and ſoul of it, doth conſiſt in applying Chriſt's merits to ourſelves, in laying hold on his righteouſneſs, and making it our own; all the anſwer that I can farther make, is this, That theſe are phraſes of man's making, and are not to be found in the book of God: But, if thoſe that uſe them will tell us what they mean by them, we ſhall be able, from that book, to give an account how far they do belong to faith, and how far they do not. If, by applying Chriſt's merits to ourſelves, and making his righteouſneſs ours; if, by theſe phraſes, they mean no more than this, that we are to expect to be ſaved through the merits of Chriſt, by the conformity of our hearts and lives to that righteouſneſs, which he preſcribed to us, and of which, in his own life he gave us an example; then, it is very certain, they give us a true notion of faith: And whoſoever ſo believes, and ſo practiſes, hath true faith. But if, by the phraſes of applying Chriſt's merits, and laying hold on his righteouſneſs, they mean a perſuading ourſelves, that Chriſt's merits are actually imputed to us, and that we are actually accounted righteous before God, becauſe he was ſo: then we ſay poſitively, that this is no part, no act, no office of that faith, which the holy ſcripture requires of mankind, in order to ſalvation. We ſay poſitively, that if this be faith, very bad men may be true believers, and very good men may be infidels; and conſequently,

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that very bad men may go to heaven, and very good may be excluded out of it.

But what then is that true, lively, ſaving faith, or belief, which is ſo often ſpoken of, as the great condition of ſalvation? This is my ſecond enquiry upon this head, and which I ſhall diſpatch in a very few words; becauſe, indeed, I have much prevented myſelf in this argument, by what has been ſaid already.

I do not know how it comes to paſs that this buſineſs of faith in Jeſus Chriſt, which is on all hands acknowledged ſo neceſſary, is, by many, made ſo intricate a buſineſs: Certain it is, to one that comes to the reading of the ſcriptures with an unprejudiced mind, there is nothing more eaſy or more obvious than the notion of it.

To believe in Jeſus Chriſt, or faith in Jeſus Chriſt, is, according to the whole tenor of the New-teſtament, never more nor leſs, than to become his diſciples; to be ſo convinced in our own minds, that he was ſent from God to be the Saviour of the world, as to yield aſſent to all that he taught, and to give up ourſelves to be obedient to all that he commanded.

This is the whole buſineſs of that faith, of which ſome men have made ſo great a myſtery. This is the whole meaning of coming to Chriſt, of receiving Chriſt, of putting on Chriſt, of being in Jeſus Chriſt, which the ſcripture ſpeaks of. And this likewiſe ought to be the meaning of all thoſe phraſes (if we will make ſenſe of them) which, tho' they be not ſcripture expreſſions, yet are commonly applied to this matter; that is, of reſting and relying upon Jeſus Chriſt, of having an intereſt in him, of laying hold upon him, and his righteouſneſs; and the like.

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The whole, of that which we call ſaving or juſtifying faith, is comprized in theſe two things: An hearty aſſent of our underſtanding to all that Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles delivered to mankind, as the will of God; and an hearty conſent of our wills, following thereupon, to be governed by thoſe laws and rules that are preſcribed to us: Or (as others are pleaſed to word it) thus: To have a ſaving faith in Jeſus Chriſt, is to own or accept of him in all his offices: to receive him as the great prophet, that came to declare the will of God to mankind, and, under that notion, to give a belief to whatſoever he taught: to receive him as the great high-prieſt, that was to make an atonement for the ſins of the world; and, under that notion, to depend upon the merits of his ſacrifice and interceſſion for the remiſſion of our ſins, and all the other benefits of his paſſion: And, laſtly, to receive him as the great king that God hath ſet over his church; and, under that notion, to reſign up ourſelves to be wholly diſpoſed of and govern'd by him.

In a word; To believe in Chriſt, is nothing elſe, but to believe the goſpel, and to ſet ourſelves to live according to it: So to aſſent to the truths of the ſcriptures, as to be induced thereby ſeriouſly to apply our minds to the denying ungodlineſs, and worldly luſts, and living righteouſly, ſoberly, and godlily in this preſent world. This, I ſay, and nothing elſe, is the notion of faith in Chriſt, wherever it is ſpoken of as the condition of ſalvation.

This is St. Paul's faith, made perfect by love, by which, he ſaith, we are to be ſaved. And this is St. James's good works, proceeding from a lively faith, by which, he ſaith, we are to be juſtified. St. Paul's

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faith, and St. James's good works, are perfectly the same thing; to us, at least, who are already christians.

To conclude: Whoever doth thus believe in Christ, as I have now represented, hath certainly true faith, and all the promises of God belong to him, how doubtful soever he be of his own state, or how little soever he can apply the promises to himself. But, whosoever doth not thus believe, be otherwise his confidence or assurance in applying the promises never so great, he hath not true faith, but may prove a hypocrite.

And this, I think, may be sufficient to give satisfaction to the persons whose case I have been speaking to. As for the doubts and scruples, that are commonly raised about repentance, those I shall consider another time.

Consider what ye have heard, and the God of, &c.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

Of Repentance, when true and ſincere.

MATT. III. 8.

Bring forth therefore Fruits meet for Repentance.

FAITH and repentance are the great, nay, I may ſay, the only conditions required in the goſpel, in order to ſalvation, and therefore, as it is of infinite concernment to every one, to poſſeſs himſelf of theſe two qualifications, ſo it muſt needs be a matter of unſpeakable trouble to all ſuch as have any care of their ſalvation, to find themſelves deſtitute of them.

And yet, ſuch is the infelicity of a great many, even good perſons, that, very often, they are apt to paſs ſuch a judgment upon themſelves; being ready to conclude, that they are in a ſtate both of unbelief and impenitence; that they have neither true faith, nor true repentance.

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As for the grounds and reaſons of their doubts concerning their faith, I conſidered them in my laſt diſcourſe, wherein I gave an account of ſaving, juſtifying faith.

I now come to ſpeak of the doubts they are apt to entertain concerning the truth and ſincerity of their repentance; and for that purpoſe I have choſen for my text the words I have now read unto you.

And here my buſineſs ſhall be to explain the doctrine of repentance, as that neither bad men may be encouraged to think they are true penitents, when they are not; nor good men diſcouraged from believing the ſincerity of their repentance, notwithſtanding the manifold failures they apprehend in themſelves, as to the expreſſions of it.

You ſee I here ſpeak of repentance, not as of ſome ſingle tranſient act or actions that are now and then to be performed by a man, upon occaſion: Not only as it is a man's firſt paſſage, from a heatheniſh or a wicked life to a chriſtian life; which is that we call a man's converſion, and in which ſenſe it is often taken in the New-teſtament.

But I conſider it as an habit, a permanent ſtate of life, a diſpoſition and qualification of mind and manners, which a man muſt poſſeſs himſelf of, and continue in, as long as he lives; otherwiſe he is not to expect the final remiſſion of his ſins. And hence it is that the good, as well as the bad among us, are taught in our public liturgy, not only every day to confeſs our ſins, but alſo every day to pray to God to grant us true repentance. Having premiſed this, I come to the argument:

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Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.

Theſe are St. John Baptiſt's words to the Phariſees that came to his baptiſm. And from them we may gather, what that repentance is, that will be available for the forgiveneſs of our ſins, and ſecuring us from that wrath to come, which he ſpeaks of in the verſe before; namely, it muſt be ſuch a repentance as brings forth worthy fruits: *Bring forth* (ſaith he) *fruits meet for repentance*; or, as the words may be rendered, *Bring forth the worthy fruits of repentance.*

So that the evangelical repentance which we now treat of, conſiſts of two parts, or is made up of two things. The one inward in our minds, which is that we properly call repentance, (μετάνοια) and that conſiſts in ſuch a ſenſe of our ſins, and hatred of them, as makes us heartily ſorrow for them, and reſolve to commit them no more. And this the Phariſees were preſumed to have, when they came to St. John's baptiſm.

The other is outward, and ſhews itſelf in our lives, and that conſiſts in the actual forſaking thoſe ſins which we ſo reſolved againſt. And this is that St. John here ſtyles the worthy fruits of repentance, or fruits meet for repentance.

This is certainly the account which the ſcripture every where gives of that repentance which God requires of us, in order to the forgiveneſs of our ſins: only with this ſlight difference, that ſometimes the inward contrition has the name of repentance given to it; and the reformation that follows thereupon is called the fruits of it, as here in my text: at other times, the reformation in our lives is called by the name of repentance; and the inward ſorrow and contrition is reckoned only as a preparative or diſpoſition towards

towards it; as when St. Paul tells us, 2 Cor. vii. 10. that *godly ſorrow worketh repentance.*

Well but, ſay ſome perſons among us, (who yet, as we have reaſon to believe, are very good chriſtians) if this be the notion of true repentance, then are not we in the penitent ſtate: for we have neither that ſorrow and contrition for our ſins, which true repentance requireth; nor do we bring forth the fruits of repentance, by reforming ourſelves as to ſeveral particular ſins, which we have often begged pardon for, and reſolved againſt. Theſe are the two caſes which I ſhall now ſpeak to; and I begin with the firſt.

They complain that they have not that ſorrow for their ſins, which is ſufficient to denominate their repentance true and ſincere. They can think of their many offences and provocations with dry eyes; and, even at thoſe times when they ſet themſelves to expreſs acts of repentance, and to make confeſſion of their ſins in a more ſolemn manner: Yet all this is done with ſo much infenſibility, and ſo little compunction, that inſtead of broken and contrite hearts, which is the ſacrifice that God delights in, they come to theſe offices rather with hardened ones.

That which I ſay to this, is this: We are not to meaſure the ſincerity of our contrition by the ſenſible expreſſions of grief with which it is ſometimes accompanied; or to conclude that we are not ſorry for our ſins as we ought to be, becauſe we are not put into a paſſion at the remembrance of them.

It is very certain, a man may have a true ſenſe of his ſins, and a hearty contrition for them, and yet not be able to ſhed a tear, even when he moſt devoutly ſets himſelf to beg God Almighty's forgiveneſs of them.

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And 'tis very certain on the other hand, that a man may weep abundantly at ſome ſeaſons, when he ſeriouſly reflects upon the great miſcarriages of his life paſt, and yet not at all be truly penitent for them.

The truth is, that part of repentance we are now ſpeaking of, conſiſts rather in a hatred of our ſins, in a deep-rooted averſion to them, than in any tranſient paſſion of grief, that we can work up ourſelves to, upon the remembrance of them.

Whoever is ſo ſenſible of the infinite evil of ſin, that he does from his ſoul deteſt and abhor it; and thereupon reſolve firmly againſt it, and uſes hearty prayers to God to ſubdue it in him, by the power of his Holy Spirit, and puts out his whole ſtrength to reſiſt the temptations of it; ſuch a man is a true penitent. This permanent hatred of ſin, and reſolutions and endeavour againſt it, is the life and ſoul of repentance: And a paſſionate grief or ſorrow doth no farther belong to it, than as it is an expreſſion of that hatred, or a means to produce thoſe reſolutions and endeavours againſt it.

But it will be urged, Can any man be truly ſaid to hate his ſins, that is not ſenſibly grieved and troubled that he hath offended God?

To this I ſay, in the ſecond place, Whoever is really affected with hatred towards his ſins, can hardly avoid the being troubled and afflicted, whenever it is his unhappineſs to offend God in any inſtance; nay, or when he ſeriouſly reflects upon his former offences. But then theſe two things are to be remembered:

Firſt, That there may be an inward grief or affliction in the mind, tho' the man that feels it cannot expreſs

preſs it in tears, or other outward paſſions. Theſe are things that depend wholly upon the make and conſtitution of a man's body, and not at all upon the ſenſe of his mind. Some perſons are of ſuch an eaſy, and flexible, and paſſionate temper, that they can ſhed tears upon very ſlight occaſions. Others, tho' they may have a more real and permanent ſorrow upon their hearts, yet cannot evidence it in ſuch ways.

But then, ſecondly, As to this buſineſs of ſorrow for ſin, there is a great conſideration to be had of the nearneſs or diſtance of the time, when the ſins we repent of were committed.

When a good man, thro' his own careleſſneſs and inadvertency, or thro' the importunity of ſome ſtrong temptation, happens to do any thing contrary to his duty, his heart will preſently ſmite him. As ſoon as ever he reflects upon the action, he will be naturally apt to be diſpleaſed at himſelf. And upon his firſt retirement and examination of his conſcience, he cannot avoid the expreſſing a great ſorrow and compunction for his ſin, and humbly and earneſtly addreſſing to the throne of grace for the obtaining forgiveneſs of it. And indeed, if he be not thus ſenſibly concerned and afflicted, when the action is freſh in his memory, and upon his conſcience, it is an argument that he has not that hatred of ſin which he ought to have; and therefore has ſome reaſon to ſuſpect whether he be in the ſtate of repentance.

But then, for ſins that have been committed a good while ago, the conſideration is quite different. If a man ſet himſelf to exerciſe acts of repentance for his ſins in general, or for ſome particular ſin that he formerly had been guilty of; in this caſe it cannot be

expected

expected ordinarily, that his grief should be so sensible, or express itself in so passionate a manner: for indeed our make and constitution will not admit of it.

Such is the contrivance of our tempers, that the remembrance of a thing at a distance, though we do endeavour to impress it upon ourselves with all the advantages we can, will hardly excite so great a passion as the thing itself did, when it was present. Time wears off the violence, and the impetuosity of the passions; tho' yet the inward sentiments and inclinations of the mind, as to those things that caused the passion, may be the same perpetually.

That which I intend by this consideration, is this; that it is enough to testify the sincerity of our sorrow for sin, if we be heartily troubled and afflicted, whenever we have newly committed any sin against God: But if afterward that trouble or grief do wear off, and we cannot bring ourselves to be so lively affected with the thing after some distance of time, as we were at first, it is no argument against the sincerity of our repentance: supposing we continue in the same hatred, and abhorrence of the evil action, and in the same resolutions not to be guilty of it any more.

But enough of this; I proceed to the other case I mentioned in the business of repentance, and which indeed has more difficulty in it than that I have now spoken to. It is this:

We hear very good people often complain, that though they are truly sensible of several sins they are guilty of, and are sorry for them, and do over and over again resolve against them; nay, and daily put up hearty prayers, that God would give them grace to overcome them; yet for all this, they frequently fall into

into them again ; nay, and perhaps every day : Now, how can they be ſaid to be true penitents, that live after this rate ? Is it not an eſſential part of true repentance to forſake the ſin, as well as to be ſorry for it, and to reſolve againſt it ? But they do not forſake the ſins they reſolve againſt ; and therefore they have juſt reaſon to conclude, that they are far from having true repentance.

This is the caſe, and there is but one way of coming to a reſolution of it, and that is by a particular enquiry what thoſe ſins are which theſe perſons reſolve againſt, and which they cannot or do not conquer.

It is very certain, that in general ſpeaking, repentance, as it is propoſed as a condition of ſalvation in the goſpel, doth include in it a forſaking of ſin, as well as a hatred of it, and a reſolution againſt it ; and conſequently, whoever does not forſake his ſins, is not a true penitent. Thus far they are right.

But then, on the other ſide, 'tis very certain likewiſe, that a man may be truly ſaid to forſake his ſins, in the goſpel-ſenſe of forſaking them, tho' yet, in the mean time, he be far from living without ſin : Nay, he may obſerve ſeveral irregularities in his actions, and be ſo ſenſible of them, as to make reſolutions againſt them, and pray to God to preſerve him from them ; yea, and conſtantly ſtrive to avoid them, and yet, now and then, thro' inadvertency, or ſurprize, or a great temptation, be overtaken with them, and all this while be in the true ſtate of repentance. I ſay, both theſe points are certainly true.

As for the firſt, That forſaking of ſin is neceſſary to repentance, there can be no doubt of it. The ſcripture tells us, Prov. xxviii. 13. That he only that *confeſſeth*

ſeſſeth and forſaketh his ſins, ſhall find mercy. And, 1 John, iii. 9. *They that are born of God, do not commit ſin.* And Gal. v. 24. *Thoſe that are Chriſt's, have crucified the fleſh, with the affections and the luſts.* And to live in ſin, or under the power of ſin, is every where, by our Lord and his apoſtles, repreſented as a thing perfectly inconſiſtent with the being a child of God.

But, on the other hand, that no man (how truly a penitent ſoever he be) doth live without ſin, is a point every whit as plain from the ſcripture as the former. St. James tells us, *That in many things we offend all:* And St. John, *If we ſay that we have no ſin, we deceive ourſelves, and the truth is not in us.* And many other paſſages there are to this purpoſe.

That therefore that makes the difference between a true penitent and a pretended one, as to this matter, muſt be the nature, and kind, and circumſtances of the ſin that is left unmortify'd, or that the man ſtill lives under the power of.

There are ſome ſins that do conſiſt with a repentant ſtate, and ſome ſins that do not. There are likewiſe ſeveral circumſtances of the ſame ſin that may difference or vary the ſtate. It may happen, that the ſame ſin which in one man is a weakneſs or an ignorance, and ſo conſiſtent with the ſtate of repentance, will in another man be a ſin of preſumption, and inconſiſtent with it. Concerning theſe things therefore, a particular enquiry is to be made, before ſatisfaction can be given to thoſe that doubt of the ſincerity of their repentance.

But, firſt of all, before we come to ſpeak of ſins that are conſiſtent with a ſtate of repentance, and ſuch as

are inconſiſtent with it; it will be fit to aſk thoſe perſons whoſe caſe we are ſpeaking to, whether thoſe things which they are moſt apt to complain of, as ſins which they cannot overcome; but notwithſtanding their reſolutions and prayers, do often fall into them; whether, I ſay, they be really ſins at all.

It is very certain, that many tender conſciences (but uninſtructed) do often reflect on, and ſeverely call themſelves to account for ſeveral things, which God will never impute to them as ſins. Thoſe that converſe with this ſort of perſons, will frequently find, that their greateſt complaints of unmortify'd ſins are made in ſuch inſtances as theſe: That they are out of temper, when they come to their devotions: that they are troubled with many fooliſh and wandering thoughts, throughout their religious exerciſes: tho' they endeavour to keep their minds in a conſtant ſenſe of God and good things, and would always profitably employ their thoughts; yet abundance of vain imaginations do croud into their heads, and render their endeavours ineffectual. That they are often wearied with the length of their ſpiritual offices, and pray without life and vigour: And, in a word, that they cannot govern their minds, but in ſpite of all their reſolutions, abundance of impertinent, and ſometimes undecent and ſinful fancies, do diſturb and quite ſpoil their moſt ſerious attempts to live a religious life.

But now, if they would well conſider, they would be convinced, that theſe kind of things are not ſo much their ſins, as their imperfections. They are the neceſſary reſults of the union of their ſouls with earthly bodies; and therefore can by no means be called their

faults, so long as they do not willingly give way to them, but strive against them.

A man may, every whit with as much reason, accuse himself of sin, when he cannot attend his worldly business with the same vigour and application of mind, that he doth at other times; as he ought, when he does not pray and meditate upon spiritual things so vigorously and intensely as at some times he doth, supposing he endeavour it.

The truth is, neither of these things is always in our power, because they depend altogether upon the temper of our bodies, which we cannot oftentimes correct or alter: And what is not in a man's power, the not doing of it cannot be a sin. There is this essential to every sin, that there must be something of the will in it. Whatever a man doth, or whatever a man omits, if it be involuntary in him, if he cannot help it, it may be his imperfection, but it is not his sin.

And this will extend farther than to those instances that I have now named. Even all the sudden motions and inclinations, that men do often find arising in themselves to that which is evil, if they be not consented to, if they be not in the least indulged and encouraged, but heartily rejected and strove against; these, even these, will not prove sins, but only imperfections and infelicities; which, if it be true, (as I see no reason that any man has to doubt of it) one great part of those things which the religiously melancholy are apt to complain of, is by this quite struck off.

Well now, but as for these things that are really sins in them, let us enquire how far they are consist-

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ent or inconſiſtent with the ſtate of repentance. Now the reſolution of this enquiry will depend upon the anſwers to theſe three following queſtions:

Firſt of all, the general queſtion is this; Do they ſeriouſly and impartially ſet themſelves againſt all ſins whatſoever? Do they harbour no affection or kindneſs for one luſt more than another, but uſe their hearty endeavours to mortify all, and to conform themſelves in all things to the laws of Jeſus Chriſt? If they can ſay this of themſelves, it is an evident argument that their repentance is true, tho' they may labour under many frailties and corruptions.

The inſincerity of a man's repentance is commonly diſcovered by this, that he is more ſenſible of ſome kind of ſins than he is of others, and is accordingly partial in his endeavours to mortify them. Thoſe ſins that are more conducing to his intereſt, or to which he has more ſtrong temptations from his temper and inclination, or from his company, or circumſtances of living; theſe he has not the ſame averſion to, nor takes that pains to avoid, that he has and does with reſpect to others, that do not recommend themſelves to him upon thoſe accounts. This now is an undeniable proof that the man doth not hate ſin, purely for itſelf, or purely becauſe it is diſpleaſing to God, but becauſe it is not ſo pleaſing or profitable to himſelf. He hath not the temptation to that ſin that he hath to others; and therefore he takes care not to be guilty of it: But, where a man can ſatisfy his own mind that he doth impartially lay out his endeavour, for the ſubduing and deſtroying in himſelf every thing that God hath declared againſt in his holy goſpel; and ſpares no evil affection, how dear or how advan-

tageous soever it may be to him in this world; but fights and strives as well against those corruptions that are rooted in his nature, and serve his worldly ends, as those that he hath no such great temptations to: Such a man hath the undoubted marks of a sincere penitent, and may, in the gospel-sense, be truly said to have forsaken his sins, and to keep GOD's commandments, notwithstanding the many slips and failures that he may be even daily guilty of. But to come more particularly to the point:

The second question to be asked is this: What kind of sins are those that these persons complain they have not overcome, but notwithstanding their prayers and resolutions, they are often guilty of them? Are they such as may be called presumptuous sins, or such as may be called infirmities and frailties? Are they such as cannot be committed without deliberation, and full choice and consent of the will; or such as they may be surprized into thro' inadvertency, or sudden temptations? If they be of the former sort, that is to say, wilful, deliberate sins, it is certain they cannot stand with the state of repentance. Either the man that is guilty of them was not a good man, or ceased to be so upon his committing them.

Of this kind are, murder, adultery, blasphemy, perjury, slander, extortion, cheating, defrauding, and the like. These sins, and such like, are in themselves so very foul, and require so full a consent of the will to be guilty of them, (for let men talk what they please, no man was ever guilty of such crimes as these, but he either had no sense of religion at all; or, if he had, he deliberately abandoned himself to vice and wickedness) that it cannot be conceived, how one single act of them

them can be reconcileable with the ſtate of repentance: Either the man was not a true penitent, when he fell into them, or he ceaſed to be ſo upon the committing of them.

But, thirdly, As there are ſome ſingle acts of ſin which are inconſiſtent with the ſtate of repentance, namely, wilful, preſumptuous ſins; ſo likewiſe is every habit of ſin inconſiſtent with it; I mean every habit of known open ſin. And therefore theſe perſons are in the laſt place to be aſked, whether the ſins they have not yet conquered be of that nature or no?

If the ſins they complain of, conſiſt in actions known to be againſt the laws of God, and they cuſtomarily continue in them, I dare not ſay, that they are yet in the ſtate of repentance. For, tho' perhaps every particular act of ſuch ſins that they are guilty of, may not be attended with thoſe aggravating circumſtances, as to make it amount to one of thoſe wilful, preſumptuous ſins I before ſpoke of; yet if the ſins be habitual and cuſtomary, they will, I am afraid, fall under that denomination.

But then theſe perſons are to be careful that they do not miſtake that for a known open ſin, which really is not ſo: or a habit of known ſin, for that which is not a habit. I ſhall repreſent the difference in theſe three following particulars:

Firſt of all, when we ſpeak of known, open ſins, we mean ſuch ſins as a man is guilty of in his actions. And therefore we make a diſtinction between the inward irregularities of the mind, which conſiſt in unlawful deſires, or diſorderly paſſions; and between the outward actions. Though the former be truly ſinful, if in the leaſt conſented to; nay, and we ought

ſeriouſly to endeavour to mortify them in ourſelves as much as we can; yet, if through the man's conſcientious care to ſuppreſs them, they do not proceed to overt-acts, they are not ſuch known open ſins as we here ſpeak of.

Thus, for inſtance; A man that is raſhly and intemperately angry upon any occaſion, this very paſſion is a ſin in him, and he ought to aſk God forgiveneſs for it: But, ſo long as he doth ſo ſtifle this paſſion, and that out of a ſenſe of religion, as not to ſuffer it to break out into unchriſtian railings and revilings; nor is he tranſported thereby to do any action in purſuance of it, that the laws of Jeſus Chriſt have forbid: I ſay, this man, notwithſtanding the ſins of his thoughts, may yet be ſaid to be free from thoſe known open ſins, which, if they be habitual, are inconſiſtentwith virtue.

But, on the other hand, where we ſee a perſon to have no government of his paſſion, but, upon every ſlight occaſion, to break out into a violent rage, and in that rage to ſay and do all thoſe provoking things that his preſent fury can ſuggeſt to him: here is now a man that is not only guilty of a known ſin, but it hath ſo much dominion over him, that he may be ſaid to live in it; and conſequently, he is not yet in the ſtate of repentance.

I inſtance in this particular of wrath and anger, both becauſe it is a ſin that ſo ordinarily happens in the courſe of our lives; and becauſe that even the very worſt expreſſions of it are generally accounted but our weakneſſes and infirmities; whereas certainly they are downright works of the fleſh, known ſins againſt the law of God, and ſuch as, if they be continued in, if they be habitual, are deſtructive of ſalvation.

Secondly,

Secondly, In order to the giving an account of known, open ſins, as we muſt diſtinguiſh between the ſins of the thoughts, and the ſins of the actions; ſo likewiſe, as to the ſins of our actions, we muſt further diſtinguiſh between thoſe of them that conſiſt in omiſſion, or not doing the things that the law of God hath commanded us; and thoſe that conſiſt in commiſſion, or doing ſuch things as the law of God hath forbidden us. Now it is the latter ſort of ſins we here ſpeak of, and of which we ſay, if they be habitual, they cannot conſiſt with the ſtate of repentance.

As for ſins of omiſſion, very good men may be guilty of them; nay, and in many inſtances, and that habitually too. Nay, perhaps I may ſay, the beſt men cannot clear themſelves as to this ſort of ſin; for I believe all men fall ſhort of doing that good they are bound to do.

But, as for ſins of commiſſion, the thing is otherwiſe; good men do uſually avoid them, but to be ſure they do not make a trade or cuſtom of them; or, if they do, I doubt they are not good men, or ſincere penitents. For I take it, whoever in his converſation or actions, ordinarily or cuſtomarily, practiſeth any thing that is expreſsly forbidden by the laws of God; ſuch an one cannot be ſaid to have mortified the deeds of the body, and to have put off the works of the fleſh, which yet in the New-teſtament is every where made the character of one that is in the regenerate, penitent ſtate.

To give an inſtance of this: The ſin of ſwearing in our converſation, or the ſin of lying, or the ſin of filthy and laſcivious talking (I inſtance in theſe ſins, becauſe ſome people may look upon them to be very

light and inconſiderable, as not having in them that miſchief and malignity, which is diſcoverable in other crimes; yet I ſay, theſe ſins being ſo expreſly forbid by the laws of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; and being likewiſe ſins in the outward actions, and conſequently certainly in our power to avoid them, ſo that we cannot plead either ignorance or infirmity for them: I ſay, whoſoever lives in the practice of theſe ſins, cannot reaſonably be thought to be in the ſtate of repentance, becauſe he cannot be preſumed to make any conſcience of tranſgreſſing the expreſs laws of our Saviour.

Well, but are not ſins of omiſſion alſo tranſgreſſions againſt the laws of God? I anſwer, they muſt be ſo, if they be ſins. But then there is this difference, that in the duties which God has commanded us to do, we are often left in ſuch a latitude as to time, and manner, and other circumſtances, that no man can ſay, you are bound to do ſuch an action, juſt at ſuch a time, and in ſuch a manner, otherwiſe you ſin againſt God. So that if a man, through miſtake or inadvertency, do omit an action that he ought to have done; why, in that caſe, when he comes to ſee his miſtake, or find his careleſſneſs, he will be ſorry for it, and aſk pardon of God for his omiſſion of the duty: But yet this omiſſion will amount to no more than a ſin of weakneſs or infirmity; which, we have ſaid all along, is very conſiſtent with the ſtate of a good man.

But now, where God hath forbid any action to be done, the caſe is quite different. For in that caſe every body knows, that that action is at all times, and in all places, and in all circumſtances, unlawful to be done by him: So that no body needs to be put to deliberate

liberate whether he should do it or no; for every body knows he ought not to do it. And if, after this, a man will venture to do such an action which he knows to be thus forbidden by God; sure he contracts a greater guilt than he would do, by the omission of a duty, as to the timing of which no law of God hath determined him.

But now, notwithstanding this difference I make between sins of omission and sins of commission, I must yet own that there may be such instances and such degrees of sins of omission, as, if care be not taken that they be amended, will prove as fatal to the man that is guilty of them, as if he lived in a course of open known sins of commission.

As for example; What shall we say of a man that never joins in the public worship of God, or that never receives the sacrament, or that never says his prayers, or confesseth his sins, or useth any devotion, either in his family, or in his closet? Or, lastly, What shall we say of a man that is blessed with plentiful circumstances in the world, and yet gives little or nothing away in charity? Why, all these are but omissions of our duty, but yet they are such omissions, as whoever continues in them, is never like to go to heaven. Nay, how damnable this last omission I named, is, you may see in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, where our Saviour passeth the sentence of condemnation on the goats on his left hand, for no other reason but purely for the not exercising works of charity towards their brethren, according to their abilities and opportunities.

But now, such sorts of omissions as these are quite out of the case I am speaking to. For I have here to

do with perſons that have really a hearty ſenſe of religion upon their minds; and therefore to be ſure can never be guilty of ſuch groſs, wilful, criminal omiſſions, as I have now mentioned. And that which they deſire to be ſatisfied in, is not how far they may neglect their duty; but, after they have done all they can towards the performance of it, whether they have yet ſo forſaken their ſins, as to be in a ſtate of repentance? Now as to that, I ſay, ſo long as they do not live in known ſins of commiſſion, the omiſſions they may be frequently guilty of, will not, I hope, hinder them from being true penitents, and in a ſtate of ſalvation.

But, thirdly and laſtly, Beſides what we have ſaid about known open ſins, we muſt alſo, in order to the reſolution of the queſtion before us, conſider another thing, and that is, Whether they be habitual or no. And for the finding of that, we muſt have regard to the frequency or infrequency of them. Every act of ſin does not make a habit; and a known ſin may be more than once committed, and yet not be cuſtomary.

If a man do ſincerely endeavour to mortify or forſake his known, open ſins, tho' he does not leave them at once, and for altogether, yet if he gains ground of them, and commits them ſeldomer and ſeldomer; even ſuch a man may be ſaid to have entered into the ſtate of repentance. And tho' he has not attained to that ſtrength and perfection which the goſpel propoſes, and which, if he continue his endeavours, there is no doubt but he will arrive to; yet, in the mean time he is in a very good way. And, if he ſhould die before his work be accompliſhed, yet, having the true ſeeds

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and principles of regeneration or repentance in him, I ſhould not doubt but God would accept him as a ſincere penitent, and receive him to his mercy.

Theſe are the things that I had to repreſent, in order to the anſwering this queſtion, What ſort of forſaking ſins is neceſſary to true repentance? and which every man is to examine himſelf about, if he would upon good grounds ſatisfy himſelf whether the ſins he is guilty of in the courſe of his life be conſiſtent with it, or no.

The ſum of all that I have ſaid upon this head, is this: If a man upon ſuch an examination can ſatisfy himſelf as to theſe following particulars; namely,

Firſt, That he doth, in the courſe of his life, ſincerely apply his mind and endeavours to mortify every evil affection, and to live in an uniform obedience to all God's commandments:

And, ſecondly, That the ſins he is guilty of, are not groſs, wilful, deliberate crimes; but rather the effects of inconſideration, or ſurprize, or a ſudden temptation:

And, thirdly, That they do more conſiſt in the irregularities of the deſires, and appetites, and paſſions of his mind, than in the cuſtomary gratification of thoſe appetites and paſſions in his actions:

And fourthly, That they are moſtly matters of omiſſion of his duty, and not ſo much expreſſed in inſtances forbidden by God's laws:

And, laſtly, That of what nature ſoever they be, tho' he has not actually ſubdued them, and got the victory over them, yet he gains ground upon them, and doth not ſo frequently repeat them; and when he doth, it is in ſmaller inſtances, and upon greater

temptations, and with leſs interruptions of his religious courſe:

I ſay, whoſoever can ſatisfy himſelf that the ſins he is moſt frequently guilty of in the courſe of his life, are of this nature, and fall under theſe circumſtances; ſuch a perſon needs not in the leaſt doubt but that for all them, he is in the ſtate of repentance, and ſhall find mercy with his heavenly Father.

God Almighty grant to us all true repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that the reſt of our life hereafter may be pure and holy, ſo that at the laſt we may come to his eternal joy, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord: To whom, &c.

SER-

SERMON IX.

Concerning the wilful ſin here ſpoken of by St. Paul, *viz.* Apoſtaſy.

HEB. X. 26, 27.

For if we ſin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which ſhall devour the adverſaries.

HAVING already ſpoken to ſeveral points, which, through their being not well underſtood, have much increaſed, if not cauſed, affliction of a great many good chriſtians, ſuch as are troubled in mind upon a religious account; I ſhall now proceed to another head of things, which is often the occaſion of much trouble and perplexity to thoſe perſons who are under the power of this ſort of melancholy.

And

And that is, their miſunderſtanding two or three texts of ſcripture, which ſpeak of a ſort of ſins for which there ſeems to be no repentance allowed, and which ſhall never be forgiven to the man that is guilty of them; which ſins yet they are often miſerably afraid that they themſelves have committed.

Theſe ſins are, Firſt, The wilful ſin, ſpoken of by St. Paul, in the words I have now read unto you, for which he ſays there remains no more ſatisfaction, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation.

Secondly, The ſin unto death, ſpoken of by St. John, as to which he ſeems to ſay, we ought not ſo much as to pray for the perſon that is guilty of it.

And Thirdly, The ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, ſpoken of by our Saviour; which he ſaith *ſhall never be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come.* Of theſe three texts therefore, and the ſins therein ſpoken of, I ſhall now give an account. And I begin with the firſt of them, to which I ſhall confine myſelf at this time.

It is no wonder that this text is ſo apt to fright weak perſons; for indeed it ſeems to declare ſo ſeverely againſt all ſorts of men, that either are, or have been wilful ſinners after baptiſm, (as God knows the greateſt part of chriſtian profeſſors have been) as to leave little hopes of the forgiveneſs and favour of God Almighty, even after their beſt repentance.

But I doubt not to give ſuch an account of this text, as will ſatisfy the moſt ſcrupulous perſon in this matter. And, in order thereunto, I ſhall inquire into theſe four things:

Firſt of all, in general, What it is to ſin wilfully, or what is the notion of a wilful ſin?

Secondly,

Secondly, Whether the apoſtle in this text ſpeaks of all wilful ſins whatſoever, or only of ſome one particular kind of wilful ſins?

Thirdly, What that particular kind of wilful ſin is?

And Fourthly, In what ſenſe he affirms that there remains no more ſatisfaction for ſuch ſin, but a fearful expectation of judgment?

An account of theſe four things is all that can be thought needful for the clearing this text.

And firſt of all, I begin with the general notion of wilful ſin.

We all of us know that ſins are commonly diſtinguiſhed by divines into three ſorts; ſins of ignorance, ſins of infirmity, and ſins of wilfulneſs. The ground of this diſtinction is laid in the ſoul of man, in which are three diſtinct prime faculties, or powers, from which all our actions flow, that is to ſay, the underſtanding, the will, and the ſenſual appetite or affections. Now, when we do any ſinful action, that faculty of theſe three gives denomination to the ſin, from whoſe fault, or irregularity, or diſorder, the action doth chiefly proceed; I ſay, doth chiefly proceed; for it cannot be denied, that in every ſin a man commits, all the three faculties do in ſome degree or other concur to it. Take the explication of this in the words of that accurate caſuiſt biſhop Sanderſon.

If the underſtanding be moſt in fault, not apprehending its duty, or not apprehending it aright; the ſin ſo committed, though poſſibly it might have in it ſomewhat both of infirmity and wilfulneſs withal, yet it is properly a ſin of ignorance. And ſuch was St. Paul's perſecuting the church; it was his want of underſtanding, it was the erroneouſneſs of his judgment, that

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mainly miſled him, and not any malice in his will, or corruption in his affections, upon which account he himſelf calls this action of his, a ſin of ignorance. But, ſecondly, if the main fault be in the affections, through ſome ſudden paſſion and perturbance of mind, either blinding, or corrupting, or out-running the judgment, (as for inſtance, fear, anger, deſire, or the like) the ſin ariſing from hence, tho' perhaps joined with ſome ignorance, and wilfulneſs withal, yet is properly a ſin of infirmity. And ſuch was Peter's denying of our Saviour: in which action his underſtanding was not in fault; for he knew very well both whom he denied, and he knew likewiſe that he ought not to have denied him: nor was the fault ſo much in his will, as to make it properly a wilful ſin; for he did not deny our Saviour out of malice and deſign; nay he came thither with a reſolution not to do it. And he ſtill honoured him in his heart, even then when he denied him with his tongue. And when the crowing of the cock brought him to conſider what he had done, *he went out, and wept bitterly.* But the failure was in his affections; it was the fear that ſurprized his ſoul, when he ſaw his maſter ſo deſpitefully uſed before his face, which made him apprehenſive of what hard uſage himſelf might meet with, if he ſhould then and there have owned him. I ſay it was that fear that for that time deprived him of the benefits and uſe of his reaſon, and made him think of nothing but how to avoid the preſent danger; and this thus proceeding from ſuch a ſudden diſtemper of paſſion, St. Peter's denial was a ſin properly of infirmity.

But, Thirdly, If the underſtanding be competently informed with knowledge, and not much blinded or tranſported

tranſported with the percuſſion of any violent ſudden paſſion or other perturbance, ſo that the greateſt blame muſt remain upon the untowardneſs of the will, reſolvedly bent upon the evil action; the ſin ariſing from hence, tho' probably not free from all mixture of ignorance and infirmity withal, is yet properly a wilful ſin; or, as the ſcripture commonly expreſſeth it, a ſin of preſumption; and ſuch, for inſtance, was the ſin of David, in contriving the death of Uriah. For this he could never pretend ignorance, nor the ſudden tranſport of a paſſion. He knew the greatneſs of the crime, and he had time and leiſure enough to bethink himſelf what he was about. He did the fact with deliberation, there was the full conſent of his own will to it; in regard of which it was juſtly to be ſtyled a wilful preſumptuous ſin.

From what has been ſaid, we may in ſome meaſure diſcover, what a wilful ſin is, and how it is diſtinguiſhed from ſins of ignorance and infirmities. Take the ſumof it in the words of the foreſaid author: "When a "man, ſufficiently convinced in his underſtanding, that "the thing he would do is unlawful and diſpleaſing "to God; or, at leaſt, hath ſufficient means ſo to "convince him, if he be not wilfully wanting to him-"ſelf in the uſe thereof; and then beſides, hath "time and leiſure to adviſe with himſelf, to examine "the caſe, and every circumſtance of it, and to apply "the light that is in his underſtanding thereunto; "and yet, when all is done, (contrary to the dic-"tates of his own reaſon, and the checks of his own "conſcience) goes on to put his wicked intentions "into act, and to fulfil his own will, notwithſtanding

" the apparent inconformity thereof to the will of " God :" This is a wilful ſin.

Having thus given the notion of wilful and preſumptuous ſins in general, I come to apply it to the text, which is the ſecond thing I have to do.

And here the inquiry is, whether, when the apoſtle ſays, *That if we ſin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſatisfaction for ſin* ; Whether, I ſay, his propoſition is to be underſtood of all wilful ſins committed after baptiſm, and the taking chriſtianity upon us; or whether he ſpeaks only of one particular kind of wilful ſins.

Now, in anſwer to this, I ſay, that certainly the apoſtle's propoſition is not to be extended to all wilful ſins committed after baptiſm, but to be reſtrained to one ſort of them ; and my firſt reaſon for this is, that otherwiſe this aſſertion of his cannot be reconciled with abundance of plain texts both in the Old and New-teſtament.

We own indeed, that whoſoever lives in any courſe of known wilful ſin, cannot, ſo long as he ſo lives, hope for the favour of God, or be preſumed to be in a ſtate of ſalvation. Nay, it cannot be denied alſo, that there are many ſingle acts of ſin, tho' they be at once committed, that have ſo much of wilfulneſs and preſumption in them, that they put a man out of the ſtate of grace, and deſtroy his ſalvation, without a particular repentance ; but, notwithſtanding all this, the ſcripture teacheth us, that both for ſuch acts, and ſuch habits of ſin, there ſtill remains a ſacrifice. The door is ſtill open to the ſinners, they are ſtill under the covenant of grace. God both calls upon them to repent, and offers them grace to do it, and will, without

out doubt, accept them, if they cloſe with it. This, we ſay, is the conſtant doctrine both of the Old and New-teſtament.

As for the Old-teſtament, how frequently do we there find God Almighty, by his prophets, calling, and exhorting, and inviting even wilful and obſtinate ſinners to repentance, and promiſing them pardon and acceptance, if they would turn to him, and leave their evil ways? And ſuch ſinners they were too, as were not heathens, but lapſed profeſſors, ſuch as were under his covenant, and had ſinned after they had received the knowledge of the truth, as our text expreſſeth it.

God, in Ezekiel, profeſſeth over and over again, that he had no pleaſure in the death of a ſinner, but rather that he ſhould turn from his evil ways, and live, and declares univerſally to all ſinners, that, *Whenever a wicked man will turn from his wickedneſs that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he ſhall ſave his ſoul alive*, Ezekiel xviii. 27.

And thus every-where do the prophets encourage the revolting backſliding Iſraelites to return to their duty, aſſuring them of pardon upon their ſo doing; and many inſtances and examples likewiſe we have of thoſe that have found mercy from God, after their falling into ſinful and grievous crimes. As David, after his commiſſion of murder and adultery; Solomon, after a courſe of debauchery and idolatry; Manaſſes, after a long life of horrid impieties. Nor, ſure, are the gates of repentance and mercy more ſhut to backſliding ſinners, in the New-teſtament, than in the Old, under the goſpel, than under the law. When St. Peter aſked our Saviour, how often he ſhould forgive his brother that ſinned againſt him, whether he ſhould do

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it ſeven times; our Saviour's anſwer was, *I ſay not unto thee, ſeven times, but ſeventy times ſeven, if thy brother ſo often ſin againſt thee.* Now, certainly, we may expect the ſame mercy from God, in caſe we ſin againſt him, that he hath commanded us to ſhew to our fellow-creatures, in caſe of their treſpaſſes againſt us; eſpecially ſince he hath declared, that our dealings towards our brother ſhall be the meaſure of his dealings towards us.

But farther: What kindneſs our Saviour bears to the ſouls even of thoſe that have fallen from their duty, after they have come to the knowledge of it; what means he uſeth to bring them to repentance, and how ready he is to pardon them, if they do repent, doth ſufficiently appear from the parable of the prodigal ſon, whom, after all his riotous living, nay, after he had wholly conſumed that portion that was given him upon harlots, his father yet, upon his return, received to favour, with all imaginable expreſſions of joy, even to the diſcontenting his other ſon, who had never diſpleaſed him.

And yet more plainly it appears, from the other parable of the man, that having a hundred ſheep, upon the ſtraying of one of them, leaves the ninety-and-nine, and goes after that which was loſt, until he finds it; and when he has found it, he lays it on his ſhoulder, rejoicing, and calls his friends and neighbours alſo together to rejoice with him. Which parable our Saviour himſelf thus applies, *Verily*, ſaith he, *joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine juſt perſons that need no repentance.*

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If any one will ſay, that theſe encouragements are given to ſinners, only upon their firſt coming to Chriſt, and taking his religion upon them, and are not to be extended to thoſe that fall or ſin wilfully after baptiſm; I anſwer, that ſuch an interpretation ſeems to do much violence to the parable. For it is to be obſerved, that the prodigal, ſpoken of in the firſt parable, is not a ſtranger, but a ſon; is already in the neareſt relation to him, that expreſſed ſo much joy for his return; not an enemy, or an alien. And ſo likewiſe in the other parable: The ſheep that goes aſtray, and about whom the houſholder is ſo much concerned, is not a ſheep without an owner, but one of his own ſheep: one that fed in the ſame paſture with the reſt of his flock; and, indeed, otherwiſe he could in no ſenſe be called his loſt ſheep. So that, if we will preſerve the decorum of the parable, it is neceſſary that we expound this prodigal, and this loſt ſheep, of theſe perſons, that, after they are made the ſons of God by regeneration of water, and of the Spirit, after they are admitted as ſheep into the fold of our great ſhepherd, the Lord Jeſus, do abuſe God's grace, and abandon themſelves to evil courſes, contrary to the profeſſion they have undertaken.

But, ſecondly, That this text we are upon, doth not ſpeak of all wilful ſins, committed after baptiſm, or the profeſſion of chriſtianity, we have this farther argument; namely, that the ſinning wilfully, here ſpoken of, muſt be meant only of ſuch ſins as whoever commits, doth, by that action, tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing, and doth deſpite to the Spirit of grace. Theſe are the very

very words by which St. Paul, in the verſe immediately following, deſcribes the wilful ſin he here ſpeaks of.

But now, it will be hard to affirm, (nay, I hope it would be untrue, if it was affirmed) that any act of wilful ſin, nay, or any habit of vice, that chriſtian profeſſors are generally or ordinarily guilty of, can fall under this imputation, or be charged with ſo high a degree of guilt, as theſe expreſſions ſeem to fix upon the wilful ſins here ſpoken of: That is to ſay; tho' the lives of chriſtian profeſſors be often bad enough, and the ſins that they live in be ſo grievous in themſelves, and wilful as to them, that without repentance they are in a dangerous and damnable condition; yet it is to be hoped, that neither the ſins are in their own nature ſo heinous, nor the will and mind, with which they are committed, ſo malicious, that thoſe that commit them, or live in them, can properly be ſaid thereby to tread under foot the Son of God, or to do deſpite to the Spirit of Grace.

From theſe things put together, I hope we may warrantably conclude, that it is not of all wilful ſins, promiſcuouſly and indiſcriminately, that St. Paul here ſpeaks, when he ſaith, *There remains no more ſacrifice for ſuch*; but only one particular kind of wilful ſins. Now, what that is, I come, in the third place, to inquire.

In this inquiry, I ſhall not trouble you with the ſeveral opinions of divines, concerning this wilful ſin; but I ſhall briefly declare what ſeems to be the true account of it, and the reaſons that do incline me to believe ſo.

I affirm therefore, that the ſin the apoſtle here ſpeaks of, is no other than an apoſtaſy from the faith of Chriſt; a renouncing of our chriſtianity. And by ſinning wilfully, he means a wilful apoſtaſy from the faith of Chriſt, a renouncing chriſtianity, not thro' ſome ſudden ſurprize, or fear, or the like, and then returning to the profeſſion of it again; but a ſet, continued, obſtinate deſertion of it, and going over to the enemy's party; that is, revolting either to judaiſm or heatheniſm, and becoming the adverſaries of Chriſt, and his religion. That this is the true and only account of this ſin, will appear from theſe two following things:

Firſt of all; The occaſion upon which theſe words come in, doth lead us to this ſenſe: We find by this term FOR, that is ſet before them, that they are deſigned as a reaſon, or argument, to inforce ſomething that was ſaid before. That that goes before, is this exhortation, (ver. 23, 25) *Let us hold the profeſſion of our faith without wavering, not forſaking the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is, but exhorting one another.* What now follows? Why, the words of my text; *For, if we ſin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful looking for of judgment.*

It is plain here, that the apoſtle's deſign is to perſuade the jewiſh chriſtians to perſeverance in their religion, notwithſtanding all the perſecutions that threatened them upon account thereof, and to caution them againſt the forſaking of chriſtian aſſemblies, and going over to the Jews, or heathens, as ſome of them had already done. It is plain likewiſe, that the argument,

gument, wherewith he would enforce this exhortation, and deter them from this apoſtaſy, is this conſideration of my text, That *there remaineth no more ſacrifice for their ſin*, if they were guilty of it, *but only a fearful expectation of judgment.* If therefore we will ſuppoſe the apoſtle to argue, as other men do, that is to ſay, that the motive or reaſon he offers ſhall have any relation to his foregoing exhortation, we muſt conclude, that the wilful ſin he mentions, and for which, he ſaith, there remaineth no more ſacrifice, muſt be the ſin from which he was now diſſuading them; namely, the renouncing of their faith, or the forſaking the chriſtian aſſembly; the frequenting of which was indeed the only evidence they could give of their being chriſtians.

But, ſecondly; The argument wherewith the apoſtle doth, in the following words, endeavour to ſtrengthen his aſſertion in the text, doth alſo add a farther probability to this expoſition: *Whoſoever* (ſaith he) *deſpiſed Moſes's law, died without mercy, under two or three witneſſes. Of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing, and done deſpite to the Spirit of grace?*

Now the deſpiſers of Moſes's law, here ſpoken of, as appears from Deut. xvii. 3. from whence the apoſtle takes this quotation, were thoſe that renounced the covenant of Moſes, into which they were enter'd, and went over to the idolaters, to worſhip the ſun, and moon, and ſtars. In all reaſon therefore, the wilful ſinners, who are here compared with them, muſt be ſuppoſed ſinners of the ſame nature; that is to ſay, apoſtates

poſtates from chriſtianity, as the others from judaiſm; otherwiſe the apoſtle's diſcourſe will not proceed naturally and coherently. But if we thus underſtand theſe words, the argument will be cloſe and ſtrong, and the apoſtle will ſpeak to this effect:

Wonder not that I tell you, there is no ſacrifice remaining for thoſe that apoſtatize from chriſtianity; for, even under the law of Moſes, there was none allowed for that crime: Whoever wilfully deſerted his religion, was, under that diſpenſation, to die without mercy; and therefore, ſurely, much greater puniſhment doth he deſerve, that deſerts his religion now, that abandons his chriſtianity, and turns an enemy to it, nay, it may be, a perſecutor of it. For, in thus doing, he treads under foot the Son of God: He deſpiſeth and blaſphemes him, who was infinitely greater than Moſes was: He counts the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing; that is, he profanes, he vilifies, he ſets at nought that blood of Jeſus Chriſt, which was ſhed for procuring the new covenant, which yet was of infinitely greater value than the blood of bulls and goats, by which the Jews were entered into the Moſaical covenant. And, laſtly, he doth deſpite to the Spirit of grace; that is, he puts an high affront and indignity upon the Holy Spirit, which is now by God plentifully poured forth upon the chriſtians, and by whom greater miracles were daily wrought, for the confirmation of Chriſt's religion, than ever were wrought by Moſes, for the proof of the jewiſh. And thus much of the third general point, what particular ſin that is, which is here called ſinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth.

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The fourth and laſt thing to be inquired into, is, what the apoſtle means, when he ſays, that *to thoſe that ſin wilfully, after they have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, to conſume the adverſary.* Now, in anſwer to this, I ſay, firſt of all, that theſe words do not imply, that the wilful ſin, here ſpoken of, is unpardonable; or, that thoſe that are guilty of it, are out of all poſſibility of obtaining forgiveneſs for it; for here is nothing in theſe words, from whence we can draw ſuch a concluſion. If indeed it had been ſaid, that to thoſe that ſin wilfully, there remains no ſacrifice for ſin, there might have been ſome grounds for ſuch an inference; but it is only ſaid, that to ſuch there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin; that is to ſay, they are not to expect another Chriſt to die for them: But, for all that, for any thing that is here ſaid, they may, upon repentance, yet have the benefit of that ſacrifice which was offered once for all, for the ſins of the whole world. There is no one ſin in the world, no, nor any habit of ſin, of ſo damning a nature, but that, upon repentance, and change of life, the ſinner may hope for pardon and acceptance; ſuppoſing the man to be but in a capacity of repenting, we may affirm, that his ſin is in a capacity of being forgiven. In the ſecond place therefore; that which theſe words do firſt and principally import, is the ſadneſs and horridneſs of the preſent condition, into which all that ſin wilfully (that is, renounce their chriſtianity) do reduce themſelves. for hereby they have forfeited all their right and title to the benefit of the goſpel-covenant; that is to ſay, the pardon of their ſins, and the promiſe of eternal life;

life; for there is but one ſacrifice, (that is, the ſacrifice of Chriſt upon the croſs) by which pardon of ſin is to be attained, and, conſequently, eternal life is to be hoped for. But this ſacrifice they have utterly diſclaimed and rejected; nay, inſtead of owning it for a ſacrifice, they have counted it an unholy thing; looking upon the death of Chriſt as a puniſhment due to him, as an impoſtor. What therefore can they now expect? Do they look for farther ſacrifice? No; it is not in the chriſtian diſpenſation, as it was in the Moſaic, wherein the prieſts offered the ſame ſacrifice every year, for ſeveral ſins that were committed. After we have once renounced our great ſacrifice, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin: Chriſt is not to offer himſelf any more. If we be ſaved at all, it is by his once offering up himſelf. If we reject that, there is nothing left, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, to conſume the adverſary.

This ſeems to be the true and natural paraphraſe upon the text. But then, thirdly and laſtly; beſides the great guilt of renouncing chriſtianity that is here expreſſed, and the dreadful condition into which men bring themſelves thereby, there is this alſo farther implied in the text, namely, the extreme difficulty, and the moral impoſſibility of recovering ſuch perſons out of that ſad condition. For this ſin is of ſuch a nature, that it utterly indiſpoſeth men, and rendereth them uncapable of making uſe of the means, by which a pardon is to be obtained. Whatever other ſin a man commits, yet ſo long as he holds the profeſſion of his faith without wavering, there may be ſome good hopes of him; he holds to the means of ſalvation, and may,

in good time, make uſe of them, and be reſtored again, by God's grace, to that ſtate of repentance from whence he is fallen. But when a man renounceth his chriſtianity, tho' we dare not ſay it is abſolutely impoſſible for him to be retrieved and recovered to his ſound mind again, yet it is a thing hardly to be expected, becauſe it is the nature of his ſin to render the very means of his recovery inſignificant and ineffectual. It is the greateſt part of his diſeaſe, to refuſe the cure. There is no means of ſalvation but one, and that is, by Chriſt; and that he diſclaims and renounces. Truly therefore may the apoſtle ſay of ſuch an apoſtate, that, as there remains no more ſacrifice for him, ſo, morally ſpeaking, and as it ordinarily comes to paſs, there is nothing left, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fiery indignation, to conſume him. And this indeed is the ſame thing that the apoſtle teacheth us, in another paſſage of this epiſtle, namely, that in the ſixth chapter, verſes 4, 5, 6. which paſſage, as it fully confirms all that I have ſaid before about the wilful ſin mentioned in my text; ſo by what I have already ſaid, a clear light is given to that paſſage: *It is impoſſible* (ſaith the apoſtle there) *for thoſe who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,* (all which expreſſions are but a larger deſcription of a chriſtian, or a regenerate perſon, or, as our text phraſeth it, of one that hath received the knowledge of the truth) *if ſuch as theſe,* (ſaith he) *ſhall fall away, it is impoſſible to renew them to repentance, ſeeing they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to open ſhame.* The falling away

away here, is certainly the ſame thing with ſinning wilfully in my text; that is to ſay, a wilful departure from chriſtianity. Now of thoſe that do thus apoſtatize, St. Paul affirms, that it is impoſſible to renew them to repentance. He certainly doth not mean an abſolute impoſſibility, but a moral one; in the ſame ſenſe that our Saviour ſaith, that *it is impoſſible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*; that is, as another evangeliſt explains it, *it is hard for a rich man*, &c. In the ſame ſenſe that it is affirmed to be impoſſible for them to do good, that have accuſtomed themſelves to do evil; that is to ſay, it is extremely difficult; it is not a thing that either ordinarily happens, or can be eaſily effected. It is true, God may, by an extraordinary providence, pluck ſuch an apoſtate out of the fire; reſcue him by a ſtrong hand from that deſperate vaſſalage to the devil, in which he is held; but he hath no where promiſed that he will: nay, he hath threatened that he will not. However, of all men living, it is the leaſt to be hoped of ſuch a perſon, that God will ſhew ſuch extraordinary mercy to him, ſince he hath wilfully put himſelf out of that ſtate of ſalvation, which God by Chriſt, had brought him into; and not only ſo, but hath abandoned and renounced all the means by which only he can be recovered.

Thus have I given you a large, and, I hope, a plain account of this difficult text: And, you ſee, there is nothing in it that needs to create any trouble or affrightment to any well-diſpoſed people among us, however they may have been guilty of many wilful ſins ſince their baptiſm, or ſince their coming to the knowledge of the truth. Nay, you ſee, there is no-

thing in it that ſhould make the greateſt ſinner among us to deſpair of God's mercy, if they have but the heart to repent; for there is nothing in this text from whence it can be concluded that any ſin is unpardonable, or that any courſe of wilful ſin is above the mercies of the covenant of grace, provided the ſinner do truly repent. Nay, neither is there any thing in this text to diſcourage the hopes of any man's repentance, how great a ſinner ſoever he hath been, ſo long as he continues in the profeſſion of chriſtianity. All this, I think, is very plain, from what I have diſcourſed upon this text.

But then I muſt add further, and which I deſire all among us would ſeriouſly conſider; it appears, by this text, that the caſe is very different as to thoſe perſons that have once profeſſed chriſtianity, and afterwards depart from it. Tho' there may be hopes of a man's repentance, let him have been never ſo bad a liver, ſo long as he continues in the communion of the chriſtian church, and adheres to the religion of Chriſt; yet there is very little hope of a man that hath once given up his name to Jeſus, and afterwards proves a deſerter, departs from the faith, and turns atheiſt, or deiſt, or, in any other ſort, renounceth that chriſtianity he was baptized into: I ſay, there is very little hope of ſuch a man; becauſe he doth properly, and, in the apoſtle's ſenſe, trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified, an unholy thing. It infinitely therefore concerns every one among us, to hold the profeſſion of their faith without wavering; and tho' they do not live ſo holy and ſo pure lives as they ſhould, and as they muſt do, if ever they go to heaven, yet, at leaſt, to con-

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tinue in the profeſſion of the chriſtian religion, and to frequent the ordinances of Jeſus Chriſt; becauſe, ſo long as they ſo do, they have the advantage of the means of ſalvation, and thoſe means may at laſt prove effectual to their converſion: Whereas, if they deſert the chriſtian inſtitution, and go over to heatheniſm, (as deiſm is but another name for that) there remains no more ſacrifice for their ſins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, to conſume them, and all ſuch contumacious ſinners as they are:

From which, God Almighty of his mercy deliver us, for the ſake, &c.

SERMON X.

Concerning the Sin unto death, ſpoken of by St. John, viz. Apoſtaſy.

1 Epiſt. of St. JOHN V. 16.

If any man ſee his brother ſin a ſin which is not unto death, he ſhall aſk, and he ſhall give him life for them that ſin not unto death. There is a ſin unto death: I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for it.

THERE are three texts (as I told you the laſt time) in the New-teſtament, relating to the ſame argument; which, as they have given much trouble to interpreters, in the expounding of them, ſo have they often occaſioned many fears and perplexities in the conſciences of timorous, melancholy perſons, by the application they make of them.

The firſt is that in the tenth of the Hebrews, where the apoſtle aſſerts, That *to thoſe that ſin wilfully, after*

ter they have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more ſacrifice for ſin, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, to devour them: And of this I diſcourſed the laſt time.

The ſecond is the paſſage of St. John, which I have now read unto you, where it is ſaid, *There is a ſin unto death*, which whoever commits, the apoſtle doth not ſay that prayer ſhall be made for him; and this I ſhall now diſcourſe of.

The third is that famous paſſage of our Saviour, in St. Matthew, where he ſaith, That *whoſoever ſhall ſpeak a word againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall never be forgiven him in this world, nor in the world to come.* This I reſerve to another opportunity.

Theſe aſſertions, at the firſt view, as they are very uncomfortable, ſo do they ſeem to claſh with ſome of the received doctrines of chriſtianity. For we generally believe, and we think we have reaſon from the goſpel ſo to do, that Chriſt, by the oblation of himſelf once offered (as our church expreſſeth it) made a full, perfect, and ſufficient ſacrifice, oblation, and ſatisfaction for the ſins of the whole world: and conſequently there is no ſin a man can commit ſo grievous, but that it will be pardoned, upon repentance. And we alſo believe and teach, that there is no ſinner in ſo deplorable a condition, that his repentance ought to be deſpaired of, ſo long as he is in the land of the living. And therefore we make no ſcruple, not only to pray for the greateſt ſinners, but to exhort them to repentance, whenever we have to do with ſuch; and to encourage them, in caſe they do truly and ſincerely repent, to hope for God's mercy and acceptance. Now this would be a very unaccountable proceeding, if we

either believed that their ſins were unpardonable, or knew that they were beyond all poſſibility of repentance. And, indeed, this has been the belief and practice of the church ever ſince our Saviour's time; tho' there were ſome ſins, which, if in ſome churches a man was guilty of, he was never to be reſtored to the communion of the faithful, or expect the church's abſolution, but to die excommunicate: yet, even in that caſe, they did not pre-judge the ſinner to eternal puniſhment, but exhorted him to expreſs his repentance all the ways he could, and made no ſcruple to encourage him, that if he was ſincere in it, he might find mercy at the laſt day with God. The Montaniſts and Novatians themſelves, who were the ſevereſt in this point, and made a ſchiſm in the church upon this very account, that they thought the church too eaſy in admitting lapſed perſons to communion, yet did never deny or diſown this; but declared it as their doctrine, that there was no ſinner but might hope for pardon from God, upon his repentance, tho' the ſins (they ſaid) he was guilty of might be ſuch as that the church had no power to pardon him!

Well! But doth not St. John here expreſsly diſtinguiſh between two ſorts of ſins? One ſort that is not unto death, and the other ſort that is unto death? And doth not he ſay of this latter ſort, that, if a man be guilty of it, we are not ſo much as to pray for him? What poſſibility then is there left of ſuch a man's ſin being forgiven him? This is the thing I now come to give an account of.

St. John's words are theſe; *There is a ſin unto death; I do not ſay that a man ſhall pray for it.* The difficulty of theſe words lies in theſe two things:

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Firſt, What is here meant by the ſin unto death?

Secondly, How we are to underſtand the apoſtle, when he ſaith, *I do not ſay that he ſhall pray for that ſin.*

I begin with the notion of a ſin unto death. A ſin may be called a ſin unto death, in two reſpects: Firſt, In reſpect of the preſent danger of death into which it puts the ſinner, tho' poſſibly, he may recover after it; and it ſhall not prove fatal to him. In this ſenſe every groſs, wilful, preſumptuous ſin, is a ſin unto death; and ſo alſo is every habit or cuſtom of known wilful ſin.

My meaning is; ſuch ſins and ſuch habits do, for the preſent, put a man into a ſtate of death, and deſtroy his title to everlaſting happineſs: But then, how deadly ſoever theſe ſins are in themſelves, yet are they not ſo in event, to all perſons; tho', to ſome ſinners, the effect and conſequence of them doth prove eternal death; yet, in others, that effect or conſequence is prevented by a timely repentance. It is here, as it is in bodily diſeaſes; a man that hath the plague upon him, may properly enough be ſaid to be viſited with a mortal ſickneſs, becauſe, oftentimes, and to many perſons, it proves ſo in the concluſion; and will probably prove ſo to him, unleſs, by timely care, and powerful medicines, he prevent it: But, if he uſe theſe means, there may be hopes of his recovery, notwithſtanding the malignity of the diſeaſe.

This is the firſt notion of a ſin unto death; ſo that, if the apoſtle ſpeak in this ſenſe, and according to the full latitude of it, the ſin unto death here mentioned muſt be underſtood of theſe grievous and capital ſins of which the ſcripture pronounceth, *that thoſe that live*

in them ſhall not inherit the kingdom of God: Such, for inſtance, are adultery, fornication, idolatry, murder, covetouſneſs, extortion, drunkenneſs, hatred, malice, and the like; every one of which, as St. Paul tells us, *do exclude from the kingdom of heaven.* See Gal. v. 21. Cor. vi. 9.

And, on the other ſide, the ſin not unto death here mentioned, and to which the ſin unto death is oppoſed, muſt be underſtood of any of theſe frailties, and infirmities, and interruptions of piety; which, tho' they are ſins properly ſo called, yet are conſiſtent with the chriſtian ſtate, or the ſtate of grace and regeneration, and deſtroy not a man's hopes of happineſs in the other world, tho' he never live to get an intire victory over them.

But, ſecondly, a ſin may be called a ſin unto death, in reſpect of the conſequence of it; that is, certain death to the ſinner; when the ſin, or courſe of ſin, is not only damnable and mortal in itſelf, but doth really damn the man that is guilty of it, doth *de facto*, deſtroy his ſalvation, and he periſhes everlaſtingly; this is truly a ſin unto death, and indeed the moſt proper notion of it, but perhaps it is not the moſt uſual.

Now, in this notion, no man can ſin the ſin unto death, but he whoſe ſins are never pardoned. And every one doth ſin the ſin unto death, (let his particular crimes be what they will) if he dies without repentance. So that, according to this account, that may be a ſin unto death in one man, that is not ſo in another: becauſe one man's murder, or adultery, or idolatry, or the like, may be damnable to him, tho' they will not be ſo to another that is guilty of them, becauſe he repents of them.

It follows likewiſe, that as no man can ſay of any particular, that it is a ſin unto death, in this notion of it; ſo neither can he ſay of any particular perſon, ſo long as he is in the land of the living, that he hath committed it; becauſe he knows not but the ſinner may repent afterwards, and God may pardon him. It is true, it is much to be feared, that many perſons may be guilty of ſuch crimes, and may ſo obſtinately perſevere in them, (of what nature ſoever theſe crimes be, it matters not) that God, even while they live, may withdraw his grace totally from them, and leave them to the hardneſs of their hearts, ſo that their everlaſting miſery may be concluded before they go out of this world. In this caſe it is certain indeed that they have ſinned a ſin unto death; but yet it is only known to God. No mortal creature can know it, unleſs he knows that theſe perſons are thus forſaken by God, and that they are out of all poſſibility of repentance, or pardon: which is hard for any to ſay of any perſon, for any ſin, unleſs they have a revelation for it, which I believe none can now pretend to.

Thus have I given you the two general ſenſes in which a ſin may be called a ſin unto death: But the great queſtion is ſtill behind; that is to ſay, in what ſenſe it is that we are to underſtand the ſin unto death here ſpoken of, and for which the apoſtle here ſeems to diſcourage our praying?

To this I anſwer in theſe particulars:

Firſt, To interpret the ſin unto death, here mentioned, of all grievous preſumptuous ſins, or habits of ſin, that, unrepented of, deſtroy ſalvation, (which is the firſt notion that I gave of a ſin unto death) I ſay, to interpret it of all ſins in general, (as ſome have done)

done) without limitation, doth not ſeem to agree either with St. John's phraſe, or the ſcope of the place. Nor can it be well reconciled with the conſtant practice of the chriſtian church, which has always thought itſelf obliged, not only to pray for ſeveral ſuch ſinners, but to admit them to communion, and to warrant their pardon upon their repentance.

In the ſecond place, To take the ſin unto death in the latter notion I have given; namely for every ſuch ſin or ſins, which, tho' they were pardonable in themſelves, and might have been pardoned to the ſinner, if he would have made uſe of God's grace for his repentance, yet have never *de facto* been pardoned, but the ſinner ſhall die in his ſin: I ſay, to take the ſin unto death, here ſpoken of, in this notion, as ſome very learned expoſitors have done, has this great inconvenience attending it; namely, that ſuch an expoſition renders the apoſtle's injunction here about praying for ſinners, wholly impracticable. For, according to this notion, none can know (as I ſaid) but God only, what are ſins unto death, and what are not; ſince it is the event alone that makes the difference: Whereas the apoſtle's injunction in the text ſuppoſeth that a man may know what is a ſin not unto death, and what is a ſin unto death; otherwiſe he would not have given us different rules for our prayers, as to thoſe two ſorts of ſins.

In the third place therefore, That interpretation of the ſin unto death, which I think moſt probable, (becauſe indeed moſt agreeable with the ſcope of the apoſtle in this place, and becauſe it avoids likewiſe the inconveniencies that follow upon the two former ways of expounding it) is this: To take the ſin unto death

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in the firſt notion I gave of it, that is to ſay, for ſome groſs, wilful, deadly ſin, that, unrepented of, deſtroys ſalvation: But not to extend it to all ſuch ſins, but to reſtrain it to one particular ſort of them, juſt as the ſinning wilfully in St. Paul, for which there remains no more ſacrifice, is not every wilful ſin committed after baptiſm, but only one ſort of wilful ſins, as I largely ſhewed the laſt time. If it be aſked, what particular kind of ſin that is, which is here called the ſin unto death? Why truly, all things conſider'd, it will appear moſt probable, that it is the very ſame with St. Paul's wilful ſin; that is to ſay, a renouncing of chriſtianity, and the communion of the church, and going over to the enemies of it. My reaſon for this aſſertion is this:

The apoſtle's buſineſs here, and indeed throughout this whole epiſtle, is to keep the jewiſh chriſtians firm to the faith, and to the chriſtian aſſemblies; from which many had now departed, denying that Jeſus is the Chriſt. (See chap. ii. ver. 18, 19. —— 22.) In order to this, he ſets himſelf to ſhew them, that whatever boaſts theſe deſerters might make, of obtaining eternal life by their way, yet eternal life was only to be had in Jeſus Chriſt; that is to ſay, by believing in him, and holding communion with his church. Thus in the 11th verſe of this chapter, *This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* And in the 13th verſe, *Theſe things have I written to you that believe on the name of the Son of God, and that ye may know ye have eternal life, ſeeing ye believe on the name of the Son of God.* And indeed upon this account it is that the name of *life* is ſo often given to our Saviour by this apoſtle, as his proper title,

tle, and diſtinguiſhing character. Thus in the firſt chapter, verſe 2. ſpeaking of Jeſus Chriſt, he tells us, *the life was manifeſted*: And again, in the 20th verſe of this chapter, *This is the true God, and eternal life*. Thus alſo in the 12th verſe of this chapter, *He that hath the Son, hath the life; but he that hath not the Son, hath not the life.*

Theſe things being thus conſidered, we may thus argue; that ſince to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, and to hold to the communion of the faithful, is (remember the apoſtle's phraſe) to be in life, or to have the life; it is reaſonable to conclude, that when he ſpeaks of being in death, of a ſin unto death, he means it of thoſe that do not believe in Jeſus Chriſt, or that renounce the chriſtian ſocieties, and go over either to the antichriſts ſo often mentioned in this epiſtle, or to the heathen idolaters, againſt whom he cautions them in the laſt verſe of this chapter, when he concludes, *Little children, keep yourſelves from idols.* And thus much let it ſuffice to have ſpoken to the firſt general point, the notion of the ſin unto death. I might add other conſiderations to confirm the account I have given of it, but I am afraid of tiring you.

I therefore paſs on to the ſecond general point to be enquired into; and that is, What is the apoſtle's meaning, when having told us, there is a ſin unto death, he adds, *I do not ſay that a man ſhall pray for it?* but of this I ſhall make no long work.

Firſt of all; It is certain that thoſe words, even according to this tranſlation of them, do not amount to a prohibition of prayer for thoſe that have ſinned the ſin unto death. If the apoſtle had meant to forbid chriſtians to pray for ſuch, he might, with the leaſt

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variation, have placed his words thus; there is a ſin unto death; I ſay you ſhall not pray for it; this indeed had been to the purpoſe: but when he only ſaith, *I do not ſay that you ſhall pray for it*, the ſenſe cannot be carried ſo high. The utmoſt that the words can be extended to is this, I do not bid you to pray for it: And every one knows that there is a great deal of difference between not bidding one to do a thing, and forbidding the doing of it.

But, ſecondly, The true and the full ſenſe and deſign of theſe words will be eaſily ſeen, if we join them with the former part of the verſe, and tranſlate them as they ſhould be tranſlated; that is, according to the moſt natural and obvious conſtruction of the Greek text; namely, thus: *If any one ſee his brother ſinning a ſin not unto death, he ſhall aſk of God, and God ſhall give life to him, even to all thoſe that ſin not unto death. There is a ſin unto death; it is not of this I ſpeak that he ſhall aſk.* (The words are, ὲ περὶ ταύτης λέγω ὅτι ἐρωτήσῃ, which, every body knows, muſt be tranſlated as I ſaid, *it is not of this I ſpeak that he ſhall aſk*) How aſk? Why, ſupply what went before, and the ſenſe will be clear, that he ſhall aſk, and that God ſhall give him life; that is to ſay, it is not of this ſin unto death that I ſpeak, when I ſay that God will hear and anſwer the petitions of chriſtians that are made for the ſins of others. They cannot pray for this with the ſame aſſurance of ſucceſs that they may have when they pray for other ſins.

This ſeems to be the whole of what is deſigned by the apoſtle in this clauſe; he doth not forbid praying for any, nor diſcourage praying for any, only he inſinuates, that prayers for ſome perſons will not be granted,

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or at leaſt they cannot ſo confidently promiſe to themſelves, that they ſhall be granted.

Having thus given an account of theſe two difficulties propoſed, there is nothing remains to make the text very eaſy and intelligible to every one, but to give a brief paraphraſe of it, according to the grounds I have laid down.

I take then the ſenſe of the whole paſſage to be to this effect:

If any ſee his brother, after his undertaking the chriſtian profeſſion, fall into any ſin, he is not to deſpair of him; ſeeing he is under the means of grace, and the mercies of the covenant. On the contrary, both particular chriſtians and the officers of the church are to intercede with God for ſuch a ſinner: And there is no doubt but, upon their prayers in the name of Chriſt, God will be prevailed with to afford him ſuch a meaſure of grace, as, with his own endeavours, and the uſe of the means of reconciliation that are lodged in the church, will be ſufficient for his recovery, and obtaining his pardon. This benefit, we that are in the church, and adhere to Chriſt's religion, have above others: tho' we ſin, there is a means provided for our recovery. As for thoſe that deny the Lord that bought them, and fall away either to the jewiſh antichriſts, or the heathen idolaters, there is not the ſame hope of them, nor the ſame encouragement as to ſucceſs, to be given to the prayers of others for them; ſince they have renounced the Son of God, who is the life, and in whom only life is to be had: They muſt needs be concluded to be in a ſtate of death. It is not therefore of ſuch ſinners as theſe that I ſpeak, when I tell you that you are to pray for thoſe that ſin, and

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that you may be confident that God will give life to them: for you cannot be ſo confident that God will hear your prayers for ſuch apoſtates; their caſe is more dangerous, and their cure more difficult.

I am afraid I have wearied you with this large explication of my text: But I ſhall make amends by the ſhortneſs of my application. Two or three inferences I would make from what has been ſaid, and I conclude.

Firſt of all: From the account I have given of this text, it appears, that it may be very lawful, nay, a very charitable and pious thing, to pray for all ſorts of ſinners, even the greateſt, any thing herein ſaid notwithſtanding: for we ſee there is nothing here ſaid that doth either forbid, or in the leaſt caſt any ill reflection upon ſuch an action; and if not here, ſure no where in the book of God.

On the contrary, St. Paul doth exhort, *that prayers and ſupplications, and interceſſions, be made for all men*, without any reſtriction, 1 Tim. ii. 1. And our Saviour commands his diſciples *to bleſs them that curſe them, to pray for them that deſpitefully uſe them, and perſecute them.* Which prayer, why it ſhould be conſtrued only to heathen perſecutors, and not extend to apoſtates alſo, I ſee no reaſon: He himſelf prayed for thoſe that crucified him: ſome of which were, without doubt, thoſe very phariſees, whom he had before charged with committing the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, in the twelfth chapter of Matthew. St. Stephen likewiſe prayed for thoſe that ſtoned him, when yet, a little before, he had told them, they reſiſted the Holy Ghoſt. Certainly there is no ſinner ſo bad, or in ſo deplorable a condition, but we may pray for him; nay, charity will oblige us to it; and

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tho' our prayers be not available for him, y
they they will be beneficial to ourſelves: and Go
Almighty, though he doth not anſwer them to th
advantage of the ſinner prayed for, yet will reward u
for our charity in putting them up.

If it be ſaid, that David was ſo far from praying fo
all, that he curſed ſeveral of his enemies, making ſo
lemn prayers, or rather imprecations againſt them, a
particularly in the cixth pſalm: To this I anſwer
firſt, that the goſpel ſpirit is a different thing fron
that of the law, as our Saviour once told his diſciples
when they were calling for fire from heaven to con
ſume their enemies, as Elias did: Chriſt's religion ob
ligeth us to a far more extenſive charity, than that o
Moſes did the Jews.

But, ſecondly, David's imprecations were not ſc
much prayers to God againſt his enemies, as prophe
cies of what evil things ſhould befal thoſe ſinners he
there ſpeaks of. Any one that underſtands any thing
of the Hebrew language, knows, that the ſame form
of words is therein uſed both in praying for a thing,
and in foretelling that it ſhall come to paſs: And as
for the cixth pſalm, which has been often called the
pſalm of curſes, it is plainly a prophecy, partly of what
ſhould befal Ahitophel for his treacherous uſage of
David, but principally of what ſhould befal the traitor
Judas for betraying his and our Lord and Maſter Jeſus
Chriſt; and as ſuch it is quoted by St. Peter in the
Acts of the Apoſtles.

But, ſecondly, from what has been ſaid, we may
raiſe matter of comfort and ſatisfaction to many weak
uninſtructed chriſtians. There are a great many, as
I ſaid, that partly thro' melancholy, and an ill habit

of

of body partly thro' the terrors of an awaken'd conſcience, joined with an ignorance and miſunderſtanding of this and the like texts, are mightily apt to conclude, that they have ſinned the ſin unto death, and that conſequently no prayer, either of their own, or other good chriſtians, will be available for them; or that they have committed the wilful ſin for which St. Paul ſaith, *there remains no more ſacrifice*; or that they are fallen from grace, and ſo it is impoſſible to renew them to repentance; or, laſtly, that they have committed the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. As for this laſt, the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, I ſhall treat of it the next time we meet: But for the other texts, I hope I have made it appear, that the perſons I now ſpeak of are no ways concerned in any of them; for I ſuppoſe the perſons that have theſe apprehenſions of themſelves, do profeſs themſelves chriſtians, and have never fallen off from that profeſſion; though, poſſibly, they may have been guilty of many other grievous ſins: they have never renounced their Lord and Maſter Chriſt, or turned apoſtates from his religion; but have always owned him and it, both in public and private: tho' poſſibly their lives and practices have not been, in all reſpects, ſo ſuitable as they ought to have been to ſuch a profeſſion.

Now, if the caſe be thus with them, I think it has been made out, with evidence enough, that they cannot be guilty of any of the crimes mentioned in theſe texts; that is to ſay, they have neither ſinned the wilful ſin, nor fallen away after enlightening, nor ſinned the ſin unto death: Since theſe crimes import neither more nor leſs than an apoſtaſy from the chriſtian religion, and going over either to atheiſm, or heatheniſm,

theniſm, or ſome other religion, that is contrary t
the chriſtian.

But, thirdly and laſtly, Let no man from hence, c
upon this account that he hath not ſinned the ſin unt
death, encourage himſelf in any evil courſe or habi
of ſin, ſeem it never ſo ſlight and excuſable to him
There are a hundred ways of going to hell, beſide
theſe ſins I have been treating of; and far the greatel
part that are now concluded in eternal miſery, it i
probable, never ſinned in this kind. Every wilful ſi
or habit of ſin, continued in, be it never ſo plauſibl
or faſhionable, be there never ſo many pleas and apolo
gies to be made for it, from temper and conſtitution
from buſineſs and intereſt, or from the mode and cuſ
tom of the place where we live; I ſay, all ſuch ſin
perſiſted in, will as certainly deſtroy a man's ſalvation,
as the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

Oh, therefore, let no man indulge himſelf in any
evil courſe, that God's law hath declared againſt, in
hopes that it will be eaſily paſſed by, becauſe it is
none of thoſe enormous crimes that do continually fly
in a man's face, and have a mark of infamy put upon
them by the laws of the country. Why, any known
ſin, encouraged and perſiſted in, and never repented
of, may prove as fatal to a man's ſoul, as a torrent of
open impieties. And again; let no man indulge him-
ſelf in any evil courſe, in confidence that he hath not
yet ſinned beyond a probability of pardon, or in pro-
ſpect that hereafter he may repent: This is a moſt
intolerable preſumption upon God's mercy, and it is
the readieſt courſe we can take to provoke God to
withdraw his grace from us, and to give us up to hard-
neſs of heart, and final impenitency. And when it
once

nce comes to that, our eternal ſtate is concluded, nd we have indeed ſinned a ſin unto death in one nſe, and no prayers or interceſſions will be available or us. But as the apoſtle ſaid in this very caſe, ſo I ope I may ſay to you, *Brethren, I am perſuaded bet-er things of you, and things that accompany ſalvation, ho' I thus ſpeak.*

I pray God give us all grace to conſider the things that belong to our everlaſting ſalvation; and in purſuance thereof to hold the profeſſion of our faith unto the end, and to bring forth fruits ſuitable to that profeſſion, by a righteous, and ſober, and godly converſation: This God Almighty grant, for the ſake of his dear Son; To whom, &c.

SER-

SERMON XI.

Concerning the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt.

MATT. XII. 31, 32.

Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men; but the blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men. And whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Son of man, it ſhall be forgiven him; but whoſoever ſpeaketh a word againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it ſhall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

IT is my deſign, at this time, to give an account of this difficult text; and in doing that, to explain the nature of that ſin, which, in common ſpeech, we call the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. I have obſerved how much that ſin is often miſtaken, and what trouble and

ıd perplexities of mind have hence ariſen to well-eaning people, but eſpecially thoſe that are hypo-ıondriac in their tempers: I thought therefore that plain account of this might be of ſome ſervice.

There are many ſins againſt the Holy Ghoſt; *Whoever grieveth the Spirit, or quencheth the Spirit*, both hich things St. Paul cautions the chriſtians againſt, ıneth againſt the Holy Ghoſt. Ananias and Saphi-, in the lye they told St. Peter, are ſaid to lye againſt ıe Holy Ghoſt. St. Stephen calls the ſtubborneſs and ſobedience of the Jews to the admonitions of the ophets, a reſiſting the Holy Ghoſt, and conſequently ſin againſt him. Simon Magus's ſin, in offering to ırchaſe the gift of the Spirit with money, was a ſin gainſt the Holy Ghoſt.

But none of theſe ſeem to be the ſin againſt the oly Ghoſt; the ſin which, by way of eminence, we all ſo, and of which we are now to treat. The not bſerving this diſtinction, has given occaſion to many f thoſe notions, concerning this great ſin, which ave too often perplexed the conſciences of weak erſons.

For the finding out what this ſin is, we muſt take he ſcriptures for our guide, and them only; nay, we nuſt keep cloſe to the very words and phraſes in which t is there ſpoken of, having alſo a ſpecial regard to the ccaſion of theſe ſpeeches.

The neglect of this is another reaſon why men have een ſo different, and ſome of them ſo unlucky, in heir apprehenſions and definitions of this ſin; run-aing away with this, that the ſin is unpardonable, hey looked not much farther in the ſcriptures for he nature of it, but preſently concluded, that that

ſin which was the greateſt, or to them appeared ſo, muſt needs be it.

There is no text in the epiſtles of the New-teſtament that doth in expreſs words mention it. And as for the evangeliſts, there are three of them indeed that ſpeak of it, but each of them but once, and all of them upon the ſame occaſion. From theſe texts therefore we are wholly to take our meaſures. Of theſe three texts, this that I have read unto you is much the largeſt and fulleſt, and therefore I have pitched upon it, and ſhall now apply myſelf to give an account of it.

In ſpeaking to it, I ſhall endeavour theſe five things:

Firſt, To give an account of the ſin here mentioned, which is expreſſed by two names, the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, and the ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt, which is here ſaid ſhall never be forgiven.

Secondly, To give an account of the leſſer ſort of ſins here mentioned, which are here put in antitheſis, or by way of oppoſition to the former; that is, in the former verſe, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy; and in the latter more particularly, the ſpeaking a word againſt the Son of man; which ſins, it is here ſaid, ſhall be forgiven unto men.

Thirdly, To ſhew in what ſenſe it is ſaid of the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, That *it ſhall never be forgiven in this world, nor in that which is to come.*

Fourthly, To examine whether from hence it may be concluded, that the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt is a ſin abſolutely unpardonable.

Fifthly, To inquire whether it is poſſible for chriſtians to commit this ſin, and likewiſe what ſins do moſt nearly approach to it.

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An account of theſe particulars will be ſufficient for the reſolving moſt of thoſe difficulties that are uſually raiſed upon this argument.

The firſt thing I am to do, is, to give an account of the great ſin here ſpoken of in the text, which is that we call the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. Now to the clearing of this, the terms by which the text expreſſeth it, will not a little contribute. We, in common ſpeech, call it the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; but the text doth not ſtyle it by that general name, but by a much more particular name; ſuch a name, as inſtructs us to what a particular kind or rank of ſins we are to reduce it: that is to ſay, blaſphemy, or ſpeaking reproachful words againſt another. It is very obſervable, that it is no where called the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, neither in this text, nor in either of the two other goſpels, but always the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, or ſpeaking againſt the Holy Ghoſt: The latter of which terms means the very ſame with the former; for blaſpheming is nothing elſe but ſpeaking againſt another. It is true, in our Engliſh language we make a difference between blaſpheming and ſpeaking againſt another, becauſe we appropriate blaſphemy to ſuch words or evil ſpeeches as are ſpoken againſt God; but the ſcripture makes no difference. To blaſpheme, is uſed, not only with reſpect to God, but with reſpect to other perſons, and things alſo; and imports neither more nor leſs than ſlander, calumny, or evil ſpeeches, againſt whatſoever or whomſoever they are ſpoken. Thus, in the 8th verſe of the epiſtle of Jude, where we in *Engliſh* tranſlate *ſpeaking evil of dignities*, in the *Greek* it is, *blaſpheming dignities*. And two verſes after, where our

tranſlators render, *Theſe men ſpeak evil of things that they know not*; in the *Greek* it is, *Theſe men blaſpheme things that they know not.* And thus St. Paul, in the third of Titus, ſecond verſe, commands, *That chriſtians ſhould ſpeak evil of no man*; in the *Greek* it is, *that they ſhould blaſpheme no man.* Thus, Rom. iii. where St. Paul ſaith of himſelf, *that he is ſlanderouſly reported of*; in the *Greek* it is, *that he is blaſphemed.* And twenty other inſtances there are of this kind.

Thus much then we have undeniably got toward the finding out the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt namely, that it doth conſiſt in blaſphemy, or calumny or ſlanderous words. That now which remains to b found out is, what kind of blaſphemy it is which is her called the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt; or, o what kind of ſlanderous words we are here to under ſtand the words ſpoken of againſt him. If we can onc come to a certain knowledge of this, we may be abl to form a certain notion of the ſin againſt the Hol Ghoſt.

Now, for this, we muſt have recourſe to the con text; and, by well peruſing that, we ſhall not fail o what we ſeek for.

The occaſion of theſe words of our Saviour in th text, was this: It appears by the 22d, 23d, and 24t verſes of this chapter, that our Saviour having ca forth a devil out of a man that was both blind ar dumb, and made him perfectly to ſee and ſpeak; ar the people being amazed at this great miracle, a concluding from hence, that Jeſus muſt neceſſarily l the Meſſiah, the Chriſt, the ſon of David; the ph riſees, to put them into another belief, and ſo hinder them from coming over to be his diſciple

do maliciouſly give out, that though Jeſus did caſt out devils, yet it was not by any divine power, but merely by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.

What now ſaith our Saviour to this? Why two things: Firſt, he endeavours to ſhew the groundleſsneſs of their ſlander or calumny; and, ſecondly, to convince them of the grievouſneſs of the ſin, and the greatneſs of the puniſhment they thereby drew upon themſelves, in thus ſcandalizing his miracles, and ſaying they were done by the power of the devil.

The groundleſsneſs of their ſlander he ſhews by offering three reaſons, or arguments, which might convince any reaſonable man, and eſpecially them, that his miracles could not be wrought by the help of the devil, but by the Spirit of God.

The firſt was, That it was utterly againſt the intereſt of the devil's kingdom, to maintain and allow diviſions among themſelves; or that one devil ſhould oppoſe or eject another, (as, if they ſaid true of our Saviour, they muſt needs do); for this was the ready way to bring that kingdom to deſolation. This is the ſum of the two next verſes.

Secondly, They had no more reaſon to ſay he caſt out devils by Beelzebub, than they had to ſay the ſame of ſeveral of their own people, or diſciples, who either did caſt out devils, or pretended ſo to do, in the name of the God of Abraham, and of Iſaac, and of Jacob. Now, ſince they caſt no ſuch imputation of magic or ſorcery upon them, why ſhould they upon him? This is the ſum of the two next verſes.

But, thirdly, which was a demonſtrative argument, It appears plainly, both from the deſign of Chriſt's miracles, and the tendency of his doctrines, that he

was ſo far from working them, by colluſion or confederacy with the devil, that, on the contrary, he was the greateſt enemy the devil had, nay, that he was his ſuperior, and overcame him, binding the ſtrong man, and ſpoiling his houſe, doing all the miſchief that was poſſible to his kingdom. This is the ſum of the two verſes before the text. And thus having, by theſe three arguments, vindicated himſelf from their ſlanders, he comes, in the ſecond place, to teſtify againſt their ſin, and to warn them of the puniſhment that attended it, in the words of the text: *Wherefore I ſay unto you, all manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto man, but the blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto man.* As much as to ſay, ſince, from what I have ſaid, it appears ſo evidently, that your charge againſt me is altogether groundleſs, and that there is no colour for your ſaying, that I caſt out devils by the help of the devil: Nay, you yourſelves are convinced, that you ſlander my works; (for it is ſaid a little before, that Jeſus knew their thoughts) and, if you would ſpeak your hearts, you cannot but confeſs, that they are true miracles, and done by the Spirit of God: I ſay, ſince this is your caſe, pray think what a grievous crime you are guilty of, in thus traducing and calumniating this good Spirit of God, and calling him a devil. *All other ſins and blaſphemies ſhall be forgiven unto men; but this blaſphemy of yours is of ſo horrible a nature, that whoever is guilty of it, ſhall never be forgiven, but is in danger of eternal damnation,* as St. Mark expreſſeth it.

Thus do the words of the text plainly lie with relation to the foregoing words; and whoever will not violently rend one part of our Saviour's diſcourſe from another,

another, muſt of neceſſity put this conſtruction upon them. So that there will be no need of many words to perſuade you, that the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, and the ſpeaking againſt him here mentioned, was ſpoken wholly with relation to the phariſees; and that this blaſphemy, this ſpeaking againſt the Spirit, was neither more nor leſs than their aſſerting, that our Saviour caſt out devils, and wrought his other miracles, by Beelzebub; or thus, their aſſerting, that the Spirit, by which he did theſe works, was an impure Spirit; than which there cannot be a greater blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt, or worſe words ſpoken againſt him.

That this is the true and only account of the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, if what I have ſaid do not perſuade us, let St. Mark's expreſs affirmation do it: He, in the parallel text in the third of his goſpel, verſe 28, 29, having ſet down this paſſage of our Saviour, *That all other ſins and blaſphemies ſhall be forgiven unto men; but he that blaſphemeth againſt the Holy Ghoſt, hath never forgiveneſs, but is in danger of eternal damnation*; in the very next verſe adds, as the reaſon why our Saviour hath ſo ſaid, *Becauſe*, ſaith he, *the phariſees ſaid he had an unclean ſpirit.*

If any one aſk, Why ſhould not this calumny of the phariſees be rather accounted and ſtiled a blaſphemy againſt our Saviour, than againſt the Holy Ghoſt? the anſwer is eaſy to any one that underſtands the ſcripture language; for there all miracles and extraordinary works, whether performed by the prophets, or by our Saviour, or by his apoſtles, are conſtantly attributed to the Holy Spirit, and accounted the effects of his power and operation; and therefore to ſay

that our Saviour's miracles were done by the devil, was moſt properly an affront put upon the Holy Ghoſt, by whom he wrought them.

I know not what farther to add towards the clearing of this point, unleſs it be to take notice of that paſſage of our Saviour, which follows three or four verſes after my text, where he is ſtill upon the ſame ſubject; *I ſay unto you*, ſaith he, *that every idle word that men ſhall ſpeak, they ſhall give an account thereof at the day of judgment.* What is here meant by an idle word? Is every light, and fooliſh, and unprofitable ſpeech in converſation, that doth not tend to edification, an idle word? God forbid: For who is there then that ſhall not be called to an account? No, the idle words here are falſe and ſcandalous words: Juſt as, to ſwear vainly and idly, is the ſcripture term to expreſs ſwearing falſly: And the tongue that ſpeaketh vanity or idleneſs, is the tongue that ſpeaketh lies. And ſeveral other inſtances there are in ſcripture where the word is uſed in the ſame ſenſe.

This then ſeems to be our Saviour's ſenſe; Verily I ſay unto you, that for every ſlander or calumny that ye vent againſt any man, ye ſhall be called to a ſevere account; and therefore much more may ye expect to be ſo, when ye calumniate and ſlander the Holy Ghoſt, by aſcribing his works to Beelzebub.

But I proceed to the ſecond thing I am to give an account of in this text, and that is, what is meant by thoſe other leſſer ſins that are here ſet in oppoſition to the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; and which, it is ſaid, ſhall be forgiven unto men, whereas the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not. There are in the firſt claſs in the text, expreſſed generally all manner of ſin and blaſphemy;

blaſphemy; and in the latter claſs, more particularly the ſpeaking a word againſt the Son of man: Theſe, it is ſaid, ſhall be forgiven unto men.

As for the firſt expreſſion, *All manner of ſin and blaſphemy*; I muſt confeſs I like their account beſt, who expound it not of all kind of ſins indiſcriminately, but of ſins of one particular ſort, namely, ſuch ſins as he was here reproving, that is to ſay, *ſins that were committed againſt others*. So that, in this ſenſe, the ſins here mentioned will be much the ſame thing with the blaſphemies; and then all manner of ſin and blaſphemy will be no more than all manner of affronts and ſlanders. This interpretation ſeems beſt to ſuit with the ſcope of the place; for our Saviour here is not diſcourſing of any ſins but ſlander and blaſphemy: And his buſineſs is to ſhew, how much the ſlander and blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt doth exceed all other ſlanders. And it is obſervable, that in the parallel text of St. Luke, there is no mention of ſins, but only of blaſphemy.

And then, as for the leſſer claſs in the text, *the ſpeaking a word againſt the Son of Man*, without doubt, by the Son of Man, we are to underſtand our Lord Jeſus Chriſt; and to ſpeak a word againſt him, will be to talk ſlightly and reproachfully of him; as calling him a glutton, or a wine-bibber, as he himſelf tells us ſeveral of the Jews did. So that theſe words are a new propoſition, and expreſs a farther ſenſe than the former verſe did: That is to this effect; I ſay, unto you, that all manner of ſlanders and blaſphemy, wherewith men ſlander others, ſhall be forgiven them; but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven them: Nay, I ſay further to you, whoever

ſlanders, or ſpeaks evil of me, who am more than an ordinary perſon, a prophet ſent from God, diſparaging either my perſon, or my preaching; yet even this ſhall be forgiven: But whoever ſpeaks againſt the miracles that I do, and ſaith they are done by the power of the devil; this is ſo horrid a blaſphemy, that it ſhall never be forgiven him, either in this world, or in the other.

If any one aſk, upon what account it is that the ſpeaking againſt the miracles of our Saviour, is of ſo heinous and damning a nature above all other blaſphemies; I anſwer, there is great reaſon for it; becauſe the miracles that our Saviour wrought, were the principal evidence that he gave, or could give, of his being ſent from God; and, conſequently, the great means for the converting the whole world to his religion. And therefore, to ſpeak againſt them, and to attribute them to the power of the devil, muſt needs be, as the moſt ſpiteful and malicious, ſo alſo the moſt miſchievous blaſphemy in the world; becauſe it was the moſt effectual way to hinder people from believing on him, and, conſequently, to defeat all God's gracious ends, of bringing men to ſalvation by the goſpel, than which the devil himſelf cannot do a worſe thing.

I paſs on to the third difficulty in this text, which is the importance of that phraſe, *neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* Our Saviour is not content to ſay, in the former verſe, that the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven; but he adds in the latter verſe, *that it ſhall never be forgiven in this world, nor in the world to come.* Which expreſſion ſome of the church of Rome would ſuborn, for the

proving

proving their doctrine of purgatory; they would conclude from hence, that a man may in the other world make ſatisfaction for his ſins, ſo that they ſhall then be forgiven him, tho' they were not forgiven in this life: But this is without any ground at all. All that our Saviour deſigns to expreſs is this; That this ſin of the blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt ſhall be grievouſly puniſhed, both in this world, and in the other: And the phraſe, by which he expreſſeth it, was very well known and familiar to thoſe he ſpoke to; it was a common and received doctrine among the Jews, that, for ſome ſins, a man was pardoned preſently upon his repentance; that other ſins were not pardoned, 'till the ſolemn day of expiation, which came once a year: That other ſins, which were yet greater, were not to be expiated but by ſome grievous temporal affliction. But all ſins (thoſe that could not be pardoned theſe ways) were yet expiated by death, ſuppoſing the man was an Iſraelite; the life of an Iſraelite was a ſufficient atonement for his ſin; and no Iſraelite, but ſuch an one as renounced his faith, could be puniſhed in the other world. To this opinion of theirs, (which is very common in their books) our Saviour in this expreſſion ſeems to have reſpect; as if he had ſaid, flatter not yourſelves with a conceit, that you Iſraelites ſhall have all your ſins purged either in this life by your ſufferings, or at the fartheſt by your death. No, I aſſure you, this blaſphemy and open affront that you put upon the Spirit of God, is a crime of ſo high a nature, that it ſhall not be expiated either in this life, or at your death; but thoſe that are guilty of it, ſhall have a miſerable portion, both in this world

and that which is to come. This ſeems to be the full importance of this expreſſion.

But there is a greater difficulty behind, which is, that I am to ſpeak to in the fourth place; and that is, Whether from what is here ſaid concerning the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, it may be concluded that that ſin is abſolutely unpardonable to all perſons that are guilty of it.

I muſt confeſs, this is an inquiry more curious than neceſſary, ſince which way ſoever it be determined, it will not much concern any of us, who cannot be ſuppoſed to have ſinned the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, or to be ordinarily capable of ſo doing: However, for the giving further ſatisfaction to timorous and hypochondriac perſons, it will not be amiſs, if we ſay ſomething to this point; leaving it in the mean time to every perſon to receive or reject, as in his diſcretion he ſhall ſee cauſe.

It is the opinion of ſeveral moſt eminent and learned divines, that our Saviour's words here are not to be taken in an abſolute, but in a comparative ſenſe; that is to ſay, that when he ſays, *All manner of ſin and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men, but the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven unto men*, his meaning is no more, than that all other ſins and blaſphemies ſhall ſooner be forgiven, than this blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt. For, ſay they, if his words be to be taken in an abſolute ſenſe, without this compariſon, then the firſt part of his propoſition is not true: For it is certain, that all other ſins and blaſphemies ſhall not actually be forgiven to all men; but ſome ſhall periſh in their ſins and blaſphemies. They ſay therefore, that our Saviour makes uſe of an

Hebrew

Hebrew form of ſpeech, which is very frequently to be met with in the ſcriptures, when the difficulty of a thing coming to paſs is deſigned to be expreſſed by the Jewiſh authors. Thus they will ſay, ſuch a thing ſhall come to paſs, but another thing ſhall not come to paſs; where it is not their deſign to affirm of the former thing that it ſhall really come to paſs, but only to expreſs the much greater difficulty there is, that the latter thing ſhould ever come to paſs. An inſtance we have of this way of expreſſion, in the 5th chapter of St. Matth. where our Saviour ſays, *heaven and earth ſhall paſs away, but my words ſhall never paſs away.* Now certainly his meaning there is not, that heaven and earth ſhall really paſs away, but that they ſhould ſooner paſs away, than his words ſhould: And ſo indeed St. Luke expreſſeth it. So that, according to this interpretation of my text, (which I muſt confeſs I think the true one) it appears that our Saviour doth not here ſpeak either of the pardonableneſs of ſome ſins, or the unpardonableneſs of others: But only comparatively, of the much greater danger and difficulty of obtaining pardon for the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, than for any other blaſphemy.

But, if we are unwilling to take the words in this comparative ſenſe, and think they ſhould rather be underſtood poſitively and abſolutely, as they are expreſſed, let us take them ſo: So let the ſenſe of them be, that all other calumnies and blaſphemies may be forgiven unto men, but this particular ſin; the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, ſhall never be forgiven unto men. Yet I deſire it may be obſerved, in the firſt place, that it will not follow from hence, that

that there is any ſin that ſhall not be pardoned upon repentance: No, ſtill this will be a true propoſition, namely, that there is no ſin ſo great, but if the ſinner do ſincerely repent, he may hope for mercy at God's hands. And, if he that is guilty of the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt, do not, or ſhall not find mercy, it is purely becauſe he doth not, or cannot repent of it. That is to ſay, when a man is come to ſuch a high degree of malice, and impudence, and obſtinacy in ſinning, that he dares affront the Holy Ghoſt, by aſcribing his works to the devil, it is juſt in God to deny that perſon that grace which is neceſſary to his repentance, and ſo to his pardon; and to leave him irremediably in the condition he hath brought himſelf into. It is upon the ſuppoſition of this only, that the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt is unpardonable. But this is the caſe of many other ſinners, beſides thoſe that have committed this ſin. Many perſons may have ſinned ſo long and ſo obſtinately, that God may have totally forſaken them before they die; and then it is certain of theſe perſons, that their ſins ſhall never be forgiven, becauſe they ſhall never repent.

So that this unpardonableneſs of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt is no bar in the leaſt to our exhorting and encouraging all ſorts of perſons to repentance, even the greateſt ſinners; nor any bar to their hopes of pardon, if they do repent; no more than the guilt of any other grievous ſin is. We may, for all that, ſafely promiſe pardon to all true penitents, for all ſins whatſoever, without exception; and in the ſame degree we can perſuade them to repent, in the ſame degree we may hope of them. Athanaſius's words do fitly come in upon this occaſion: "God did not,

"ſaith

" ſaith he, ſay to him that blaſphemes and repents, " It ſhall not be forgiven; but to him that blaſ- " phemes and remains in his blaſphemy: For there is " no ſin that God will not pardon to them that wor- " thily repent *."

But, Secondly, I add this farther, that this ſaying of our Saviour's, taking it in its rigorous ſenſe, doth not exclude all thoſe that ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, from all poſſibility of repentance, and therefore conſequently from all poſſibility of obtaining pardon: For there are ſeveral degrees of blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt. This blaſphemy in ſome perſons may be aggravated with more knowledge, and wilfulneſs, and malice, than in others; and theſe others, that ſin with leſs knowledge, and leſs malice, and leſs wilfulneſs, are more capable objects of God's grace, and mercy, and forgiveneſs. And beſides, it is enough for the verifying theſe kind of threatnings, that they ſhall generally, and for the moſt part, be inflicted; tho' not always, and in all caſes, and on all perſons. Thoſe very perſons that our Saviour here chargeth with the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, and that afterwards crucified him, yet thoſe very perſons our Saviour prays for, that their ſin might be forgiven; and thoſe very perſons St. Peter afterwards preached to, and calleth upon them, to waſh away their ſin by baptiſm and repentance. This is an argument that the caſe of all them was not deſperate, but that ſome of them might repent and be forgiven. And one of the fathers doubts not to ſay, (I think it is St. Ambroſe) that ſome of thoſe three thouſand that were converted by St. Peter's firſt ſermon, were of theſe pharifees

* See *Queſt. ad Antioc.* 72, p. 285.

phariſees that had been guilty of the blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt. (ſee Mr. H. p. 22.)

There is nothing more poſitively threatned in the New-teſtament, than actual damnation to the unworthy receivers of the Lord's ſupper, among the Corinthians. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily*, ſaith St. Paul, *eateth and drinketh damnation to himſelf.* Now let us take damnation here in what ſenſe we will, it will be very hard to ſay that all thoſe that did then eat or drink unworthily, or have done ſo at any time ſince, did or ſhall actually incur that puniſhment. God Almighty, like all other lawgivers, when he makes laws, and annexes puniſhments to them, to deter from the tranſgreſſion of them, doth not thereby ſo tie up his own hands, but that he hath ſtill the power of granting repentance, and upon that, pardon, as he ſees cauſe: And in the midſt of his judgment his mercy will find place, if the ſinner, by a monſtrous degree of obſtinacy, hath not made himſelf uncapable of it.

But enough upon this head. Having thus given an account (or at leaſt endeavoured it) of all the difficulties in the text, what remains, is, in the fifth and laſt place, to inquire, whether chriſtians at this day can be guilty of this blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt: And what thoſe ſins are that do moſt nearly approach to it.

This inquiry is the more needful, becauſe ſeveral perſons, under the power of melancholy, are apt to fanſy they are guilty of this unpardonable ſin, tho', as it may appear from what has been ſaid, without any reaſon at all. I ſhall briefly comprize what I

have to ſay upon this head, in theſe following particulars:

Firſt of all, if we take the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt preciſely as our Saviour here diſcourſeth of it, it is impoſſible that any man now living ſhould be guilty of it, becauſe no man can be in thoſe circumſtances that they were whom here he charges it upon; they were eye-witneſſes of his miracles, and ſo had the greateſt evidence that was poſſible of the truth of them, and yet attributed them to ſorcery and witchcraft. But now, none but thoſe that lived at that time, were capable of blaſpheming in this manner. Secondly, It is impoſſible for one that profeſſeth chriſtianity, ſo long as he profeſſeth it, to be guilty of the blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt here ſpoken of: I do not ſpeak, as to the circumſtances, (for as to thoſe I juſt now ſpoke) but as to the kind of the blaſphemy, he cannot be guilty of that kind of blaſphemy. For whoſoever profeſſeth chriſtianity, let him be never ſo wicked otherways, yet he pretends to believe that it is the true religion, and that Chriſt was a true prophet. And, if he pretends or profeſſes to believe ſo, he cannot at the ſame time give out that Chriſt was an impoſtor, and wrought his miracles by the power of the devil, which, as I have ſhewed, is the only blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt mentioned in the goſpel.

Thirdly, If there be any man among us that is convinced of the truth of the matter of fact concerning our Saviour's hiſtory, that believes there was ſuch a perſon as Jeſus, that he preached ſuch a doctrine, led ſuch a life, wrought ſuch miracles as he is recorded to have done, and yet, contrary to his own conviction,

tion, ſaith, that this Jeſus did theſe extraordinary works by the power of the devil, ſuch a man hath blaſphemed the Holy Ghoſt in the ſame kind, tho' not with the ſame circumſtances that the phariſees did. Farther, if any one do aſcribe the mighty works that were done by the apoſtles, and the other firſt chriſtians, by virtue of the deſcent of the Holy Spirit upon them, which were as great and as convincing as the miracles our Saviour himſelf wrought; I ſay, if any one do aſcribe thoſe to the devil, being convinced of the truth of the matter of fact; ſuch an one alſo blaſphemes the Holy Ghoſt in the ſame kind, tho' in different circumſtances, as the phariſees did.

Fourthly, All atheiſtical perſons, that deny the being of God or providence, and ſcoff at all religion, and would make others believe that it is a mere cheat and impoſture; tho' they are not guilty of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, becauſe they do not believe the miracles of our Saviour, yet they have ſinned as much, or more, againſt the natural light, and are guilty of as great, if not greater blaſphemy than the phariſees were, namely, the blaſphemy againſt God the Father: And conſequently, their ſin will be as unpardonable, or more unpardonable than theirs.

Fifthly, A total apoſtacy from the chriſtian religion, and going over to the enemies of it, is of all other ſins the neareſt to the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt; and may, ſometimes, prove the very ſame: And accordingly, as ſevere things are ſaid againſt this ſin by the apoſtles, as are ſaid againſt the blaſphemy of the Holy Ghoſt, by our Saviour.

Sixthly, There are other ſins, which, tho' they are not of ſo horrid a nature as this I now mentioned, yet

yet have in them a natural tendency towards this great unpardonable ſin we are ſpeaking of. And therefore every one that has any regard to his ſoul, ought more eſpecially to beware of them. Such are profane drolling upon religion, turning into ridicule the holy ſcriptures, the matter of faith: And, laſtly, infidelity, and not believing and owning Chriſt's religion, notwithſtanding all the evidence we have of the truth of it. Theſe, it is true, are none of them directly blaſphemies againſt the Holy Ghoſt, but they have ſome affinity with it: And a ſad account have thoſe perſons that are guilty of them, to make at the day of judgment, unleſs they prevent it by a timely repentance.

But, Seventhly and laſtly, It appears plainly from the account we have now given, that thoſe ſins that do moſt trouble and afflict the conſciences of chriſtians, as taking them to be the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, are far from being what they take them to be; nay, are of a quite different nature. The general opinion that people among us have of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, is this, that it is any great, wilful, deliberate ſin, committed againſt conſcience, after a full conviction, when the Spirit of God in their hearts teſtified that they ought not to do this wickedneſs. All theſe kind of ſins are indeed bad enough, and will as certainly damn us, without repentance, as the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. But yet it is plain, from the account I have given of that ſin, that they are no ways akin to it, but of a quite different nature. For the proper notion of that ſin, as I have often ſaid, is the affirming our Saviour's miracles to be magical and diabolical; which, it is to be hoped,

hoped, thoſe that commit theſe deliberate ſins, are far from doing. There is another notion of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, that obtains among ſome, which is far more unlikely than this I have mentioned; but it is to be confeſſed, that it is only thoſe that are deeply afflicted with hypochondriac melancholy that do entertain it. It is this, that wicked, and atheiſtical, and blaſphemous thoughts are the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt: But I would aſk ſuch, Do they encourage theſe thoughts, or no? Do they delight in them, or do they vent them as the fixed and ſettled ſentiments of their minds, and that too deſigningly and and maliciouſly? If they do not, (as I dare ſay, of all others thoſe that thus complain are leaſt likely to do) they may be aſſured that they are far from having committed the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt. Nay, perhaps, (as the caſe may be) from having committed any ſin at all. Another notion taken up about the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt by ſome people, is, that it is not a complying with the good motions that are ſometimes made to their ſouls by the Spirit of God. But there is no occaſion to give any further anſwer.

I have gone thro' all the points I propoſed to diſcourſe on upon this text. I have no more to add, but that it would pleaſe God, who hath brought us to the knowledge of the truth, to the belief of his Son, and his miracles and doctrines, to eſtabliſh and confirm us every day more and more in that knowledge and belief, that we may never fall away from him, or affront the Holy Spirit, nor ever diſhonour his excellent religion with a looſe, vicious, unchriſtian life.

This God of his mercy grant, &c.

SER-

SERMON XII.

How far we are bound to intend God's glory in our actions.

1 Cor. X. 31.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

THE doing all our actions to the glory of God, is the great duty, and ought to be the great buſineſs of our lives; and accordingly, among all ſorts of pretenders to religion, there is nothing more talked of than that, and yet perhaps it is a point that is often miſunderſtood. For which reaſon I ſhall at this time make it my buſineſs to inquire into the true notion and importance of this great point, and to give ſome account of thoſe caſes that are uſually put about it.

To do our actions to the glory of God, is to do our actions ſo, as that God may be glorified by them.

Now,

Now, how that is to be done, we may have a great deal of light from St. Paul's diſcourſe in this chapter. He had ſpent the greateſt part of it in reſolving ſome caſes of conſcience, about eating thoſe things which had been offered in ſacrifice to idols; in what caſes it was lawful to a chriſtian to eat of them, and in what caſes it was utterly unlawful: And again, when it was lawful, in what caſes it was convenient for a man to uſe his chriſtian liberty, and in what caſes it was convenient he ſhould not uſe it, upon account of the weakneſs of other mens conſciences. And the reſult of all his inſtructions and advices, concerning theſe points, is comprized in the words of my text, and thoſe that follow: *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence neither to the Jew, nor to the Gentile, nor to the church of God: Even as I pleaſe men in all things, not ſeeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be ſaved.* The ſenſe of which words is plainly this: That whenever chriſtians were invited to that ſort of feaſts he had been ſpeaking of, that not only as to their eating and drinking, but in all the other actions of their life, the great rule they were to walk by was this, of doing honour to God, and advancing his religion in the world. And therefore let them have a care of giving offence, or putting a ſtumbling-block before any: Let them have a care of doing any action that might diſcourage the brethren in their profeſſion of chriſtianity, or encourage the heathen to continue in their idolatry, for all ſuch actions were a diſhonouring of God; but let them endeavour all poſſible ways, by their innocence and virtue, and their prudent and charitable behaviour, to adorn the doc-

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trine of God in all things, and by that means to recommend it to all about them.

From hence now it appears pretty plain, that this precept of glorifying God in our actions, or doing our actions to the glory of God, hath this general ſenſe and meaning: That we take care to live according to Chriſt's religion, and that none of our actions be contradictory to it, or caſt a blemiſh upon it, and thereby hinder others either from continuing in it, or coming over to it: But, on the contrary, that we uſe our utmoſt diligence to frame our converſations in ſuch a way as may both ſhew us to be ſincere, conſcientious chriſtians ourſelves, and may likewiſe tend to the honour and advancement of chriſtianity in others. In a word, we then glorify God, according to St. Paul, when we are as good as we can, and do as much good as we can.

This, I ſay, to me ſeems to be the true notion of doing our actions to the glory of God; as would farther appear, if it was needful to inſiſt on it, both from ſeveral other paſſages of ſcripture, and likewiſe from the reaſon of the thing. As for ſcripture, I will only take notice of two paſſages; one is that of our Saviour, in the xvth of St. John, the 8th verſe, where he tells his diſciples, *Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; ſo ſhall ye be my diſciples.* If they had aſked him this queſtion on purpoſe, How or by what means a man might bring glory to God, or do his actions to the glory of God? he could not have given a more direct anſwer to ſuch a queſtion, than he hath done in theſe words: *Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*; as much as to ſay,

ſay, the true way of glorifying God, is to abound
all the fruits of a holy and chriſtian converſation.

The other text I ſhall name, is that of St. Pau
Phil. i. verſ. 8. 10, and 11: *I pray*, ſaith he, *tha your love may abound more and more, that ye may b ſincere and without offence, being filled with the frui of righteouſneſs, which are by Chriſt Jeſus unto th glory and praiſe of God.* Nothing can be more plai from hence, than this, that we then advance the glo ry and praiſe of God, when our love towards othe does abound, when we are ſincere and without of fence, being filled with the fruits of righteouſneſs which the goſpel of Chriſt obliges us to. Nor is thi only the ſcripture account of the thing, but the ver notion which nature and reaſon will ſuggeſt to us For pray what is the glory of God, if we go to th very ſtrictneſs of the expreſſion, but the manifeſtatio of himſelf to his creatures, the communications of hi excellencies and perfections to others beſides himſelf to others that had no being of themſelves, but wer made by him.

This is the glory of God, and therefore by una voidable conſequence it follows, that theſe creatures theſe beings to which God manifeſts himſelf, to whic he communicates his perfections, do then glorify him or do their actions to his glory, when they live ſuit able to thoſe ends for which he created them: Tha is, when they live in obedience to his laws, and en deavour as much as they can, to make all their fellow creatures do ſo too. It is impoſſible we ſhould give any glory to God in any other ſenſe: For, alas! we can add nothing to him, we cannot in the leaſt aug ment his infinite happineſs and perfections with al

our ſkill and induſtry. He would from all eternity have been as great, and as powerful, and as wiſe, and as juſt, and as holy, as he now is, tho' none of us had been in being. But ſince it pleaſed his infinite goodneſs to create an innumerable company of beings to partake of his fulneſs, and happineſs, and perfections, as this act of his was glory in him, or to his glory, or rendered him glorious; ſo in our living up to the ends we were made for, in our being like God, and copying out his perfections in our own minds, in our loving him and obeying him, and having the ſame univerſal love and kindneſs to all the creation that God hath to us; in this, I ſay, conſiſt all the returns of glory that we can make to him, all the glorifying of him, or ſhewing forth his glory, that we are capable of.

It was his glory that he made us, and deſigned us for excellent purpoſes; and we then, according to our ſcantlings, return glory to him, when we ſerve thoſe purpoſes he made us for, by living religiouſly ourſelves, and advancing his religion all the ways we can in the world. This, I ſay, in the very nature of the thing, is all the notion we can have of doing our actions to God's glory; and thus indeed it was that our Saviour glorified God while he was in this world, as he declares in the xviith of St. John, the 4th verſe; *Father*, (ſaith he) *I have glorified thee upon earth*; and how was that? Why he adds, *I have finiſhed the work thou gaveſt me to do.*

Having thus explained my text, and fixed the notion of doing all our actions to the glory of God, that which I have now to do is to make ſome uſeful inferences

rences from what has been said, both with relation to our instruction and our practice. And,

First of all, From hence we learn what the things are that are necessary to be observed by every one that means to do all his actions to the glory of God.

And they are two; first, that he doth so intirely devote himself to God, as to make his service the great and principal business of his life. For if the glorifying God consists in living up to the ends of our creation, and doing him and his religion the best service we can possibly; then it is certain no man can glorify God as he ought to do, that doth not make this the main end, or that hath any interests to pursue that are dearer to him than religion and virtue. I do not say it is necessary, in order to the observing the precept of the text, that a man by every action that he doth, should intend and design the glory of God; for I shall shew by-and-by, that that is not required: But this I say is necessary, that a man should have such a constant sense of God and religion upon his spirit, as that it shall influence and govern all the other projects of his life. So that he shall always be in a condition of truly saying, I am God's, and not my own: I am devoted to his service, and the main business of my life shall be to approve myself to him; nor will I engage in any design that is inconsistent with this.

In the second place, as a man, in order to the doing his actions to the glory of God, must thus honestly fix his general principles and designs; so will it be also necessary that he take care of his particular actions: At least thus far, that he never do any action that he knows is sinful or contradictory to the laws of God.

God. For indeed, as the only way we have of glorifying God, is to keep his laws, so the only way that we can dishonour him, is by breaking them. And therefore, whatever a man's principles be, if he consent to the doing of any evil thing, he is so far from glorifying God at that time, that as the apostle expresseth it, in the iid of the Romans, *By breaking his laws he dishonours him.* But of this likewise I shall have occasion to speak more by-and-by. In the mean time this I lay down, and I desire it may be remembered, that whoever takes care of the two things I have now mentioned; that is to say, so fixes the great design of his life, that he makes it his main business to serve God; and likewise so orders his actions, that he doth not thereby transgress any known law of God; such a man cannot fail of observing the precept in my text, of doing his actions to the glory of God.

The second inference I draw from what has been said, is this: If this notion of glorifying God, which I have laid down, be admitted, then there will be an easy solution given to some difficulties, which have not a little exercised both the wits of disputing men, and the consciences of the scrupulous. There are three of this nature, which I shall briefly touch upon.

First of all, it has been a great question, Whether a man is not by virtue of this precept bound so to prefer the glory of God before all other considerations, as to be well contented and satisfied, even with his own damnation, if that did really tend to God's glory. For, say they, if God's glory be our highest end, then we ought to be well pleased with every thing that makes for that end; and if our own de-

ſtruction do advance God's glory, we have little love to God, if we be not well contented he ſhould deal ſo with us.

Thus ſome very ſeraphical men do talk. But it is a very hard doctrine, and yet withal very hard to be diſputed againſt: But the comfort is, if the notion that I have now laid before you be true, there will need no diſputing againſt it; for it will of itſelf fall to the ground: It will be an idle thing for any man to diſpute ſuch a queſtion, or to trouble himſelf about an anſwer to it. For, as I have ſhewn, to endeavour the glory of God, and to endeavour our own ſalvation, is perfectly the ſame thing. There is no difference at all between them; and in the ſame degree, and by the ſame ways that we can be ſaid to promote our ſalvation, or to avoid deſtruction, in the ſame degree, and by the ſame way we advance God's glory. So that were it not for the over-fruitfulneſs of ſome mens heads, in framing diſtinctions where there needs to be none, there could be no competition at all between theſe two things.

The ſecond queſtion that is uſually put with reference to this point, and which is much like the former, is this: Whether a man be not ſo purely to regard the glory of God in all his actions, as to have no conſideration of himſelf, or of any benefit that he ſhall receive by his ſervice of God; or if he did ſerve God with proſpect of being rewarded by him, whether is not this an argument of a ſelfiſh mercenary ſoul, one that is not yet arrived to the goſpel ſpirit?

To this queſtion, as it is much of the ſame nature with the former, the ſame anſwer will ſerve. We ought not to make any diſtinction between God's glo-

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ry and our own happineſs, as this queſtion ſuppoſeth. What God hath joined together, let no man put aſunder. To glorify God, and to work out our own ſalvation, as I have ſhewed, is the very ſame thing, only under a different conſideration; by doing either of the things we do both of them. And therefore there can be no doubt that it is lawful, and will be acceptable to God to deſign or intend either of them; ſince by ſo doing, if we go thro' the work, both of them will have their effect. God hath ſo contrived things, that if I do but love myſelf heartily, and out of that ſelf-love do endeavour all the ways I can to promote my own future happineſs; this very ſelf-love, and this endeavour to do myſelf good, ſhall be the moſt effectual way, nay the only way to promote and advance his glory. And on the other ſide, if it can be ſuppoſed that I have no concern for myſelf, but lay all my deſigns, and do all my actions purely out of reſpect to God, without any conſideration of my own intereſt; yet this will effectually be moſt for my own good at the laſt; for we then ſerve ourſelves in the higheſt degree we are capable of, when we love God as much as poſſibly we can.

But that it is indeed very allowable in any chriſtian to ſerve God out of a proſpect of receiving advantages to himſelf thereby, cannot in the leaſt be doubted: For if this be not admitted, what poſſible account can we give of the method that God himſelf hath thought fit to pitch upon for the bringing us to ſalvation? The way by which God hath been pleaſed to deal with mankind, is to propoſe rewards to them for the exciting them to be obedient to his laws; and to denounce puniſhments for deterring them from ſin;

and this is the great design of all his revelations, the main business of the whole scripture is authoritatively to declare to us from God, that if we will serve him, we shall be happy; but if not, we shall be miserable. Now, if it was not allowable for us to make use of these considerations as motives to incline us to that which is good, and arguments to fright us from that which is evil, the scriptures would be the most empty piece of pageantry in the world; and all the work we make with encouragements, promises and threatnings, would be a mere idle noise that signified nothing.

Nay, in the second place, so far need we be from fearing that our religion is selfish upon this account, that in the practice of it we look upon our benefit and advantage, that I believe we may truly say, that our Saviour himself, when he was here upon earth, did in some measure act upon the same principle; for it is told us expressly by St. Paul, in the xiith of the Heb. that Christ himself, for *or in consideration of the joy that was set before him*, (that is to say, the rewards that his human nature should receive for his sufferings) *endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now for ever set down at the right hand of God:* And in the chapter before, where he is commemorating and applying the noble and great actions of the patriarchs, and what mighty trials they underwent for the cause of God, he tells us particularly, *That those great things they did and suffered, because they had respect to the recompence of reward.* And therefore surely that which the apostle allowed and commended in them, will be no great blemish or disparagement to us, if we practise it now. But then, thirdly, let me add this farther upon this head, Whoever

ever is once heartily religious (upon what principle ſoever he become ſo) will not, cannot be of a ſlaviſh mercenary ſpirit: For he will not love himſelf only, but he will heartily love God too. He will love God for himſelf, and he will love virtue and goodneſs for itſelf, becauſe he is infinitely ſatisfied that theſe objects are lovely in themſelves, and that God hath done the greateſt kindneſs to mankind that is poſſible, in recommending them to man's choice, and affections, and purſuit. So that at the ſame time that he loves himſelf, he will love God as well as himſelf, becauſe he knows it is in the nature of things eternally impoſſible for him to be any further happy, than he hath a participation of God and his nature. And as for the curioſity of diſtinguiſhing whether it be preciſely the love of God, or the love of himſelf, that puts him upon doing good actions, he will not trouble himſelf about it. Nay, if he ſhould be ſo critical as to examine himſelf concerning this point, it is impoſſible he ſhould be able to diſcover which, or to give any anſwer to the queſtion. For in his conſideration, the love and ſervice of God, and his own happineſs, are ſo involved and wrapt up together, that he cannot make a diſtinction between them.

A third queſtion which is frequently put upon the occaſion of this text, is this: Whether in every action we do, we ought not to have a particular reſpect or attention to the glory of God in that action, becauſe it is ſaid by the apoſtle, *That whether ye eat or drink, ye muſt do all to the glory of God.*

To this I eaſily anſwer, from the grounds before laid down. It is not ſaid we muſt think of God's glory in every thing we do, but that we muſt do all our ac-

tions to the glory of God. Now that is certainly done, as I said before, when all our conversation is just, and honest, and virtuous, and proceeds from a good principle, and tends to the honour of our religion, but no way to the disparagement and scandal of it. This is to glorify God, and this only.

Taking now this for granted, we may assuredly both eat and drink, and do whatever we do to the glory of God, even at the same time that we have no actual thoughts of this, but have quite other considerations in our heads: As for instance;

When we are following our employments and callings, we do glorify God in these instances, as far as such instances are capable of advancing God's glory; if in our dealings with those that are concerned with us, we do behave ourselves sincerely, and uprightly, and conscientiously, tho' yet we have not at that time, when we are thus managing our business, any distinct respect to the giving glory to God in what we do.

When we are at a feast, and set down at a meal, we do truly give glory to God in that action, if our discourse and conversation be sober and modest, and agreeable to the christian rules; and if withal we do eat and drink temperately, so as not to prejudice our health, or our business, tho' we have no other design of religion in our heads at that time.

Thus again, when we give alms, we do sufficiently secure the glory of God by pitying a poor man, and relieving his necessity, tho' we have no other respect or consideration.

And thus, in the last place, when we set ourselves to our religious offices, for instance, to the exercise of

of prayer and devotion, we need not in the leaſt doubt, but that when we approach to God with an honeſt heart, ſenſible of our own vileneſs, and of the great needs we ſtand in of his mercy and grace, and ſo pray heartily to him for it, tho' we deſign nothing more hereby at this time than our own benefit, and the performance of our duty; yet this is a glorifying God in this action, as much as the action will bear.

And ſo we may ſay of all particular actions of human life, that are done as they ſhould be done; it is ſufficient to entitle them to the honour of being done to God's glory, if they be regularly done, and purſuant to the main deſign of our religion; which is the ſame thing with the glory of God.

But if this will not ſatisfy a ſcrupulous perſon, let us put a familiar caſe in another matter, which will perhaps give ſome ſatisfaction, when the dry reaſon of the thing will not.

The chriſtian life is often compared in ſcripture to a journey; and with great reaſon, ſince St. Paul hath told us, *that we are all here in the ſtate of pilgrims and travellers, and have no abiding continuing city, but are ſeeking one to come.* Taking now the chriſtian life under this notion, here comes the caſe? Is every man that takes a journey bound at every ſtep he makes in his way to think of his journey's end? Muſt he be continually under a neceſſity of exerciſing his thoughts and meditations upon the great deſign for which he took that journey, or otherwiſe he cannot make any progreſs in it? No certainly; as long as he travels on, and takes the right path, and neither goes backwards, nor to the right hand, nor to the left; tho' he may in his paſſage entertain himſelf with ſeveral

thoughts and fancies; tho' he may have in his mind twenty little bye deſigns, which have little relation to his main buſineſs; yet, I ſay, ſo long as he purſues his main deſign, and ſtill goes forward in the right road, no body living will deny, that he is every day advancing in his way, and will at laſt, if he continues in this courſe, ſafely arrive at the place whither he is bound.

The caſe is juſt the ſame as to the matter we are ſpeaking of; the great end of the chriſtian pilgrimage is the glory of God, or which is all one, the ſalvation of our ſouls; and we do not fail to ſerve this end, and to contribute to the attainment of it, ſo long as we travel in thoſe paths of righteouſneſs and virtue, which our Lord Jeſus Chriſt hath chalked out to us; but whether in every ſtep of our chriſtian pilgrimage we do actually intend this, or intend it not, it is no great matter, ſo long as our main deſign is upon it, and we go on in the direct road that leads to it.

But let us leave theſe queſtions, and come to ſome other inferences from this doctrine: In the third place, if this account we have given of glorifying God be true, if it be the glory of God that all men ſhould be good, and do good, and that we then ſhew another his glory, when we thus are, and thus do; then it follows, that we ought to believe that God has a kindneſs for every one of us; and on the contrary, it is a great derogation from his glory, to think or teach that any of us are in our original creation deſigned by God to be miſerable, without reſpect to our evil actions.

I know it has often been ſaid, that it is as much for the glory of God, that ſome beings ſhould from eternity be appointed veſſels of wrath and diſhonour, (that

(that is, the objects of God's hatred and displeasure) as it is that others should be designed vessels of honour, and as such be made eternally happy: Not for any good or evil that God did forsee one would do more than the other, but merely because he would have it so: For, say they, both these things do equally manifest God's infinite and absolute power, and dominion, and sovereignty; and therefore they are both equally for his glory.

But I wish those that talk at this rate would a little better consider the notion of God's glory. Such a promiscuous indiscriminating way of proceeding as this, may well enough become some sorts of creatures, that would be arbitrary in all their actions, and have no sense of law or justice: But I am sure it can never suit with the nature of the holy blessed God, who is infinitely benign, and just, and good; and who never dealt nor will deal with his creatures, but in such a way as they themselves shall at last, when their eyes are opened, be satisfied is righteous, and fair, and equal. It may perhaps be the madness and insolence of some great disturbers of mankind, to make wars, and create abundance of miseries to poor harmless creatures, for no other cause but to inlarge their dominion, and advance their power and grandeur: And this they may account their glory. But how infinitely different is this kind of glory, from that which God Almighty proposeth to himself? It is not in his nature to do any thing but what is agreeable to the eternal laws of justice, and reason, and goodness, which are essential to his own mind; and as far as the scripture gives us an account of him, he never did, nor doth, nor will act in an arbitrary way with his crea-

tures: But his government of the world in all inſtances hath been and ever will be managed by infinite goodneſs and righteouſneſs; and therefore theſe opinions are heartily to be rejected by all that love God, and are zealous for his glory, which do ſuppoſe that he hath made any creature on purpoſe that that creature ſhould be eternally miſerable, or which do ſuppoſe that he is the cauſe or the author of ſin in any, either of mankind or devils.

Alas! in common ſenſe, how can ſuch a proceeding as this be for the glory of God? We that are but poor precarious beings, yet ſure we have many of us better notions of our own glory than this comes to. Would we take it for an advancement of our honour or grandeur, to tread upon a ſorry worm, or other animal that ſhould come in our way, and ſo deſtroy its being? It is true by this trampling on a worm we ſhew what power we have over that poor worm: But will any man of ſenſe think that we are a whit the more glorious for doing ſuch a mighty action? And if we poor ſilly creatures have ſo much ſenſe as to deſpiſe a man that would think to augment his glory in treading upon a worm, can we with patience endure to hear it of Almighty God, who is a thouſand times more above us, than the greateſt of kings are above the meaneſt worms? I ſay, can we with patience hear it ſaid of God, that it is for his glory to make a poor creature to deſtroy him, or to trample upon any being, and make it for ever miſerable for this reaſon, that his power, and greatneſs, and abſolute dominion, is hereby the more magnified and illuſtrated? But it will be ſaid, Are there not ſome perſons that ſhall be ſaved eternally; and

others

others that ſhall periſh eternally, and this by God's appointment? And ſince every thing that God doth is for his glory, is not God glorified as well in the damnation of the one ſort, as in the ſalvation of the other? To this I anſwer: There is no doubt of it, God doth receive glory as well from his inflictions and puniſhments, as from his rewards: But this is not in the leaſt inconſiſtent with that notion of God's glory that we have before laid down; nor, on the other ſide, doth it give the leaſt countenance to the doctrine we are now oppoſing. The thing will be very evident by repreſenting this matter in another form, and ſuch a one as we all well enough underſtand.

Let us ſuppoſe a ſovereign prince in this world, that hath all the authority over his ſubjects that a man can have; it is in his power to reward or puniſh, but when or how he thinks fit. What now is the end of this power and authority, that is thus veſted in him? Is it to do what he pleaſeth? Is it to diſpoſe of the lives and fortunes of his people in an arbitrary way? To prefer ſome to honours and dignities, and to decree others to halters and gibbets, without any conſiderations of the merits or demerits of the men? No certainly, no man living will ſay, that the prince's office was given him for this end: His great work is to govern his people to the beſt advantage of them that it is poſſible. *He is the miniſter of God to them for their good*, as the apoſtle tells us in the xiiith to the Romans. God hath made him an inſtrument for the doing the greateſt good to thoſe under his charge, that he is capable doing, or they capable of receiving; but he is no

an inſtrument of doing miſchief to the meaneſt of thoſe that belong to him.

Well, now, this is his duty, and this is his office; and by governing his people in this way, and to this end, he doth, in the beſt manner that is poſſible, conſult his own honour and glory. But here comes the caſe: Some of his people are of ſuch tempers and manners, that they will not ſubmit to his authority, nor obey his laws, be they never ſo juſt and reaſonable; but do moſt wicked, enormous things, againſt all common honeſty and good manners, and ſuch things as, if they be countenanced or encouraged, will quite deſtroy the government, and with it the good of the people. Is it not now fit that the prince ſhould puniſh theſe people in proportion to their crimes, or doth this in the leaſt reflect upon his goodneſs? No, certainly, not in the leaſt. His deſire and his deſign is to make all his ſubjects as happy as may be: But there are ſome that will not be happy under his government, but will do a great deal of miſchief both to themſelves, and to all the reſt of the ſociety. Thoſe therefore he ought to make examples of; and, by ſo doing, he is ſo far from acting arbitrarily, that indeed he would injure his ſubjects, and ſhew himſelf to be weak, and unfit to govern, if he did not thus exert his power of avenging, as well as in other caſes he doth of rewarding. And it is as much for his glory that he puniſheth incorrigible criminals that deſpiſe him and his laws, as it is that he rewardeth faithful and worthy ſubjects. And yet the glory in both theſe reſpects is the ſame; that is to ſay, it is the glory of the prince to do all the good he can to his ſubjects; and he cannot do that, unleſs he diſ-

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courage and punish the impudence of wicked men, as well as encourage and reward those that are good.

And this is the true state of the case between God Almighty and us: He doth not in the least design the misery or hurt of any of his creatures: He means well to us all, as being the father of us all, and would have us all to be happy; and this is his glory. But if we will not obey his laws, and so come to happiness, he will yet glorify himself another way, (that is, as the sovereign ruler and judge of the world) by punishing us after our deserts. And even this is a pursuance of his doing good to mankind, wherein, as we have said, his glory doth consist; because, without this administration of affairs, the good of mankind could not be secured.

But, Fourthly, Another inference I draw from this point, is this: How much do they dishonour God Almighty, and act in contradiction to this precept in my text, of doing all their actions to his glory, that either think to advance God's glory by doing ill actions, or that colour over their ill actions with the specious pretences of doing them for God's glory? What can be an affront to God, and his glory, if both these be not so?

God is then glorified, as we have often said, when we are good, and do good, when we live like christians, and in all our actions have an awful regard to our duty: But now what can be more opposite to this, than either to break God's laws with a design to glorify him thereby, or to pretend the glorifying of him, when yet we are only carrying on our own wicked designs? The latter indeed of these is much the worse of the two, but yet they are both very bad; and

and yet, as bad as they are, God knows the practice of them has been too common in all ages; the world, by sad experience, has found the effects of them. How many men, out of good designs, have done very evil things? Hence come all the counterfeit books for the advancement (as the contrivers of them intended) of the true religion; hence come the fabulous miracles of saints; and twenty other pious frauds, and religious cheats, (we may call them in English) under which a great part of christianity at this day groaneth.

But of the latter sort of hypocrisy the instances are innumerable; nothing has been more common, than for men to carry on their covetous, or revengeful, or ambitious designs, under the specious pretence of promoting religion, and advancing God's glory. Indeed, most of the wars, or tumults, and rebellions, and insurrections, and conspiracies, and massacres that have happened in Christendom, have been begun and carried on, and had their successes from these pretences. So that Luther was not much in the wrong, when he said, *in nomine Domini incipit omne malum.* The greatest mischiefs and wickednesses come recommended to us under the name of religion, and the glory of God.

But, oh, how intolerable is all this kind of practice? The worst things that can be spoken against it, are not bad enough. If a man would set himself on purpose to dishonour God, and to bring a scandal on his religion, I do not know how he could do it more effectually, than thus to do unrighteous and wicked actions, for the sake, or under a pretence of piety and christianity. A man ought not to make the

the leaſt falſe ſtep in morals, ought not to commit the leaſt ſin, for the carrying on the beſt cauſe in the world. Be his intentions never ſo pure; be the glory of God, and the advancement of true religion, never ſo much in his eye; yet all this will not ſanctify one evil action, one wilful tranſgreſſion of any law of God; and therefore much leſs will it ſanctify rapine, and thefts, and ſacrilege, and murder, and, rebellion, and treaſon, and ſuch other infamous crimes.

To conclude all: If we will truly do our actions to the glory of God, let us, in the firſt place, endeavour to poſſeſs our minds moſt firmly with a ſenſe of the holineſs, and kindneſs, and benignity of the divine nature; and acquaint ourſelves wholly with the purity, and ſimplicity, and goodneſs of Chriſt's religion; and let us ſo far conſider theſe things, as to be heartily perſuaded we can never do any honour or glory to God, but by living up as exactly as we can to all his laws, and doing all the credit and reputation to his goſpel, that, in our ſtation, we are capable of. And therefore let us propoſe it to ourſelves as the great deſign of our lives, to ſerve God, and to be good, and to do good; to be as exemplary in our lives, and as uſeful in our generations, as we can: but, above all things, let us be infinitely careful that we never pretend religion to ſerve a ſecular turn, nor ever do an ill action for the promoting the beſt deſigns in the world: I ſay, let us do our endeavours to perform theſe things; and to our endeavours to add our conſtant prayers to God, for his grace and Spirit to enable us to perform them; and

then I dare confidently pronounce, whatever infirmities and frailties we may be otherwiſe attended with, we ſhall live up to the rule that is here given us by St. Paul; that is to ſay, *Whether we eat or drink, or whatſoever we do, we ſhould do all to the glory of God.*

To which God in three Perſons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, &c.

SERMON XIII.

Solution to ſome Caſes put about Regeneration.

ROM. XII. Part of the 2d Verſe.

— *Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.*

I Deſign at this time to treat of the doctrine of regeneration, and to ſpeak to ſome of thoſe queſtions and caſes upon this ſubject, which I have often found very well-diſpoſed perſons to be uneaſy under, for want of a reſolution about them: For this reaſon I have now pitched upon this text.

And here, in the entrance of my diſcourſe, it is fit I take notice, that the being transformed by the renewing of our minds which is here ſpoken of, tho' it be commonly underſtood to be the whole of regeneration, yet it is really but one part of it, tho' indeed it be the principal part.

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For regeneration, or the new birth, conſiſts of two parts, an outward baptiſm, which includes a profeſſion of Chriſt's religion, and an inward ſanctification or holineſs of heart and life. This is expreſly told us, both by our Saviour and by St. Paul. By our Saviour, in the iiid of St. John, where he tells Nicodemus, firſt of all in general, That *except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God.* And in the next words he explains himſelf wherein this new birth doth more particularly conſiſt; *Except a man* (ſaith he) *be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* So that to a man's being born again, there muſt go both the baptiſm of water, and the renewing of the Spirit.

And exactly to the ſame purpoſe doth St. Paul expreſs himſelf in the iiid of Titus, ver. 5. *God* (ſaith he) *according to his mercies hath ſaved us, not by works of righteouſneſs, which we have done, but by the waſhing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt. The waſhing of regeneration*, there, is the outward part of it: *The renewing of the Holy Ghoſt*, there, is the inward.

I wiſh thoſe that are offended at our church for teaching, in her offices, that infants are regenerated by baptiſm, would a little more have conſidered of this. I am ſure both ſcripture and antiquity ſpeak in this language.

The truth is, this term of regeneration, or the new birth, hath ſuch a reſpect to baptiſm, that it cannot be well underſtood without taking that in.

Our Saviour, no doubt, took this expreſſion from the Jews, as he did abundance of others; and that which

which they meant by it, was nothing elſe but a man's becoming a proſelyte to their religion, and being admitted thereto by baptiſm. For baptiſm among them, as well as among us, was the way of receiving proſelytes into the church; tho' indeed, to one ſort of proſelytes, they made circumciſion neceſſary, as well as baptiſm. And whoever thus came over from heatheniſm to the profeſſion of the God of Iſrael, and was thus admitted into the Jewiſh church, I ſay, every ſuch perſon was ſaid to be *recens natus*, new born, or regenerate. Nor was this only an empty word among them, but it had real effects; for they accounted a proſelyte to be, to all intents and purpoſes, ſo new-born, that they judged him, from henceforward a perfect ſtranger to all his natural relations, even to that degree, that he might lawfully marry with ſuch perſons as, before his being a proſelyte, he could not, by reaſon of conſanguinity or affinity, contract matrimony with. (See Dr. Lightfoot and others.)

Now we have great reaſon to believe that our Saviour uſed this term in the ſenſe they did; and when he declares, that *except a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God*; that which he means to expreſs hereby, was the abſolute neceſſity that there is upon every one, both Jew and Gentile, to become a proſelyte, a diſciple of his; and, as ſuch, to be admitted into his church, if he meant to go to heaven. It muſt be owned, that our Saviour took more into his notion of regeneration, than the Jews did; for, amongſt them, an outward baptiſm, and an outward profeſſion, was ſufficient to entitle a man to the name of new-born: But our Saviour farther requires a man's

man's being born of the Spirit, as well as being born of water, in order to his entring into the kingdom of heaven; that is to ſay, beſides the outward baptiſm, and the outward profeſſion, there muſt be an inward principle of virtue and holineſs wrought in the profeſſor, by the Spirit of God: But yet this doth not hinder but that both theſe things may go together; nay, it is certain they will always go together, unleſs a man himſelf put a bar to it: For whoever hath the outward regeneration of baptiſm, will alſo have the inward regeneration of the Spirit, if he be not falſe to God and himſelf. God's Spirit doth always accompany God's ordinances; and therefore I think it dangerous to ſeparate the outward regeneration from the inward.

But it is not the outward part of regeneration that I am now concerned with; tho' I wiſh that ſeveral of the ſects among us would a little more concern themſelves with it: It is the inward part of it I am now to treat of; that which the apoſtle, in my text, very ſignificantly expreſſes by the being *transformed by the renewing of our minds.* Now the inquiry here is, what the apoſtle means by this expreſſion? Why, for that you cannot be at a loſs, if you pleaſe to look at the foregoing words, to which theſe are put by way of antitheſis. This verſe, of which my text is a part, begins thus; *Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.* Now, if we know what conformity to the world is here forbidden, we may certainly know what transformation, or renewal of our minds, is here required.

As for the conformity to the world, that is here forbidden, I believe no body thinks there is any more intended

intended by this prohibition, than only a ſinful compliance with the cuſtoms of the world; a framing of our lives and manners after the impious practices and examples that we ſee frequently repreſented before us; an indulging ourſelves in ſuch bad courſes as the men of the world do too often give themſelves liberty in.

Taking, now, this to be the true notion of being conformed to the world; then the being transformed by the renewing of our minds, which is put in oppoſition to it, muſt denote our being acted with more heavenly and divine principles, and framing our converſation in ſuch a way as is ſuitable to the profeſſion of chriſtianity, which we have taken upon ourſelves: It muſt denote ſuch an holy diſpoſition and frame of ſoul, as doth effectually produce a conformity of all the outward actions to the laws of the goſpel, to which the law of ſin, and the courſe of the world, is oppoſite.

St. Peter hath moſt fully expreſſed both theſe parts of St. Paul's exhortation, in the 14th and 15th verſes of the 1ſt chapter of his 1ſt epiſtle; *As obedient children*, (ſaith he) *not faſhioning yourſelves according to the former luſts in your ignorance*; (there is the being not conformed to the world:) *but as he that hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of converſation*; (there is the being transformed by the renewing of our minds.) This, I ſay, is the full importance of St. Paul's expreſſion in my text; as it is alſo all that is meant by the other expreſſions we meet with in ſcripture of this kind; ſuch as, the *new creature*; the *being born of God*; the *being led by the Spirit*; the *being created after the image of God*; the

putting

putting on the new man; and the like: All theſe expreſſions, and whatever others you meet with in the New-teſtament of the ſame ſort, can ſignify no more than this, that to your baptiſm, and belief, and profeſſion of Chriſt's religion, you add a ſober, righteous, and godly converſation; and this out of an honeſt, ſincere, and holy principle.

Having thus given an account in general of the ſpiritual regeneration, I now proceed to anſwer ſome queſtions, and reſolve ſome caſes, that are uſually put about it. In ſpeaking to which, we ſhall be let into farther light, as to moſt of thoſe points that concern this argument.

The queſtions that I ſhall treat of, are theſe four:

1. Whether regeneration be not ſo intirely the work of God's Spirit upon a man's mind, as that he himſelf is perfectly paſſive in it, and can do nothing at all, either as to the forwarding or hindering of it in himſelf?

2. Whether any man can be truly, that is, inwardly regenerate, that hath not, ſome time of his life, experienced in himſelf a real change or transformation, as it is here called, of his own mind from bad to good?

3. Whether this change be not always performed ſo perceptibly, as that the man himſelf can give a particular account both of the time when, and the manner how, it was wrought in him?

4. What are the marks or characters by which a man may be able to judge of his own regeneration; and what we are to think of thoſe numerous marks that are commonly given in this matter?

I begin with the firſt, Whether regeneration be not ſo intirely the work of God's Spirit upon a man's mind, as that he himſelf is perfectly paſſive in it, and can do nothing at all either as to the hindering or forwarding of it?

I ſhould not have thought of moving this queſtion, did not the reſolution of it very much concern our practice; tho', at the firſt ſight, it looks like a point of ſpeculation. For if a man can contribute nothing at all to the renovation of his own mind, to what purpoſe ſhall we employ any thoughts, or uſe any endeavours, about it? And what hath a carnal wicked man to do, but to wait for the good hour, when God ſhall touch his heart in a powerful irreſiſtible way? And then the work will be done to his hands. To this queſtion, therefore, I give this anſwer; That as to the firſt part of it, it is true; namely, the producing in a man that holy divine frame of ſoul, which is neceſſary to denominate him a regenerate man, is intirely the work of God's Spirit. Nor can any of the higheſt and moſt glorious angels in heaven work ſuch a cure upon the meaneſt ſoul of the lapſed ſons of Adam, as this amounts to. It is only the Spirit of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that can renew the image of God in fallen man.

But then, though this be true, it is to be remember'd, that God always acts with men in a way ſuitable to their own natures; and he having made them free agents, capable of chuſing or refuſing, he always deals with them as ſuch: And therefore it is in their power either to accept and cheriſh God's grace when he offers it, and then it ſhall have its effects; or to refuſe and deſpiſe it, and then, to be ſure, it will be loſt

loſt upon them: *They will receive the grace of God in vain*, as the apoſtle expreſſeth it. So that I make no ſcruple of ſaying, That tho' regeneration, or the renewing of our minds, be wholly the work of God's Spirit, yet it is in a man's power either to hinder or to forward that work in himſelf: Nay, I do not doubt but that all the chriſtian profeſſors among us, how bad ſoever they be, would be made partakers of the renewing of the Holy Ghoſt, as well as they are of the regeneration of baptiſm, did not they themſelves put a bar to it, by the obſtinate reſiſtance of the motions of God's Spirit within them, and the neglect of the means that he vouchſafes them for grace and ſalvation. As therefore, on one ſide, every man that finds this happy work wrought in him, ought moſt humbly to thank God for it, and to aſcribe it all to his free grace and mercy; ſo, on the other ſide, it will concern every man that is yet in a ſtate of ſin and wickedneſs, to uſe all endeavours imaginable to get out of it as ſoon as he can; and, in order thereto, to call earneſtly upon God for his grace; and as he beſtows it (as he certainly will, upon earneſt prayers) to cloſe with it, and encourage it as much as is poſſible; otherwiſe there is little probability that ever he ſhould become a convert to virtue and holineſs.

Well, but it will be ſaid, How can this conſiſt with the ſcripture account of this matter? Is not every man, in his natural eſtate, repreſented there as dead in treſpaſſes and ſins? And is not regeneration the infuſing a new nature into a man, and making him a new creature? Now, would it not be abſurd to ſay that a dead man can do any thing towards the raiſing himſelf to life, or that a creature can do any

thing towards the new forming and creating of himſelf? I anſwer, that as abſurd as it ſeems, yet it is the very language of ſcripture. Doth not God call upon Iſrael, in the xviiith of Ezek. ver. 31, to make themſelves a new heart, and a new ſpirit? Doth not St. Paul, in the vth of Epheſians, ver. 14. ſpeak to ſinners in theſe terms, *Awake thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee life?* Nay, doth he not in this very text lay it before the Roman chriſtians as a duty incumbent upon them, and as the matter of his particular requeſt to them, that they would not be conformed to this world, but that they would be transformed by the renewing of their minds? What means all this, if men were mere ſtocks and ſtones, and muſt be perfectly paſſive in this buſineſs? No, aſſuredly; tho' it be God that creates the new heart, tho' it be Chriſt that gives the life, and tho' it be the Spirit that transforms the mind, yet the man himſelf hath ſomething to do in this work.

The truth is, it is the miſunderſtanding theſe phraſes of ſcripture, and ſtraining them farther than they were intended, that is the occaſion of all theſe miſtakes about regeneration. They will take the term of regeneration, or the new birth, or the new creature, in a literal ſenſe; whereas theſe words ought only to be underſtood figuratively; that is to ſay, we are not to imagine that, for the producing the effects which theſe words import, there is a new ſoul, or a new mind, or a new nature created in a man, by the Spirit of God, which is the literal way of underſtanding theſe words; but only thus, that the ſame ſoul which before had a vicious inclination, is now,

by the grace of God, virtuouſly diſpoſed; that the ſame mind which was before ignorant of the things of God, and utterly averſe to them, is now enlighten'd to a better underſtanding of them, and doth more love and delight in them, than it did before; the nature in the regenerate and unregenerate is the ſame; that is to ſay, it is the ſame human nature that is common to all men; but only in the one it is very much corrupted and depraved; in the other it is amended, and reſtored, in ſome meaſure, to its true perfection and liberty.

Thus, again; When the ſcripture ſaith, that *we are all dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, and that God by Chriſt hath quickened us, and created us again to good works*; theſe words are not to be ſtrictly underſtood, but only metaphorically; here is neither a proper death, nor a proper quickening, nor, laſt of all, a proper creation: But all that is meant by theſe terms, is this, that mankind, thro' their original degeneracy, and the evil examples they ſaw before them, were gone ſo far in a courſe of ſin, that there were no human means left by which it was poſſible to gain them over to holineſs and virtue. But God, by ſending his Son, and giving them the powerful arguments of the goſpel, and aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit, to ſet home thoſe arguments, did that which, by the ſtrength of nature alone, could not be done.

But enough on this head; only let me tell you this before I leave it; That if we will needs interpret ſuch phraſes and words as theſe in a groſs literal ſenſe, we ſhall intangle ourſelves in as many difficulties as the papiſts have brought themſelves into, by literally conſtruing

ſtruing our Saviour's words, *This is my body*, to the purpoſe of their doctrine of tranſubſtantiation.

The ſecond queſtion I am to treat of, is this; Whether ſuch a transformation by the renewing of our minds, as the text ſeemeth to imply, that is, a ſenſible change from bad to good, be neceſſary to every perſon; or whether ſome may not be truly in the regenerate ſtate, tho' they never experienced ſuch a change or transformation in themſelves?

This queſtion might indeed receive its anſwer from what has been already ſaid about the notion of regeneration in general; but, however, I will ſpeak ſomething more to it, becauſe it is a point that hath troubled ſome very good perſons. They know by the ſcriptures, that regeneration is abſolutely neceſſary to ſalvation. They know, that except a man be born again, be created anew, be transformed by the renewing of his mind, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. And they likewiſe ſo underſtand theſe expreſſions, that, in their opinion, they muſt at leaſt import a very great change in a man's mind, and in his actions. But now, in what a condition are they? For they have never found ſuch a change in themſelves; they have been always much in the ſame frame and temper of mind that they are now in; they thank God they have ever had a hearty ſenſe of religion, and they have endeavoured to ſerve God in that way of chriſtianity which they have been educated in, with great ſincerity; and God, in mercy, hath preſerved them from all great and open violations of their baptiſmal covenant. But ſtill, where is their regeneration? For they are but now what they have always been.

But to this ſcruple of theirs, we eaſily anſwer; If a man find in himſelf all the effects of regeneration, it is no great matter whether they were wrought in him with a ſenſible change of his mind or manners, or without one.

The great buſineſs here to be conſidered, is, the ſtate of man's ſoul. If that be acted with holy principles, and thoſe principles ſhew themſelves in a conſtant courſe of virtuous actions, which is that which we call the effects of regenerating grace, or the ſtate of regeneration, it is enough; the man may ſatisfy himſelf he is truly regenerate. But as for the manner how he came into this ſtate, or whether ever he was in a different condition before, and ſo underwent a great change before he was brought to this; this is but a circumſtance of the buſineſs, and needs not to be much regarded.

It muſt be acknowledged, that at the time when our Saviour and his apoſtles uſed theſe words, they did import a remarkable change in the perſon to whom they were to be applied, ſuch a change as every one might be ſenſible of: And the reaſon is this; chriſtianity was then a new religion, and all the world was to be converted to it, and none were then capable of being converted by the apoſtles preaching, but thoſe that were come to years of diſcretion; and the very notion of their converſion was an actual renouncing of their former religion, together with all their wicked and idolatrous practices they had lived in, and giving themſelves up intirely to the diſcipline and conduct of our Lord Jeſus. Now, I ſay none could thus forſake one religion, and go over to another, and and leave ſuch practices and cuſtoms which they were

bred up in, and form their converſation after a new and a ſtricter way, but they muſt needs be ſenſible of a great change both in their principles, and in their lives. And this is one great reaſon why the chriſtian ſtate of life is deſcribed in ſuch terms as converſion, transformation, the new creature, and the like.

But now that chriſtianity is become the religion of kingdoms and nations, and all perſons are baptized into it in their infancy, the caſe is quite different. For having by this means the advantage of a chriſtian education, the principles of that religion will by degrees be ſo inſtilled into us, that when we come of age to chuſe for ourſelves, we ſhall, without any violence or difficulty, embrace the doctrine of that religion, rather than any other; and it will be unnatural and a violence to be of any other religion. And conſidering further, that the grace of the Holy Spirit doth conſtantly go along with outward ordinances, we cannot doubt but abundance of perſons are ſanctified from their infancy; and as they have embraced the goſpel from the beginning, ſo have their manners been ſuitable to it from the beginning likewiſe.

Thus, I ſay, it often happens to perſons among us, tho' it could not be ſo when the apoſtles of Chriſt firſt preached the doctrine of regeneration: Many of us are holy and regenerate from our childhood; we were conſecrated to God in the infancy of our lives; and as we grew up, the grace of God was not wanting, thro' the means of a religious education, to ſow the ſeeds of all virtue and holineſs in our ſouls: And ſtill as we further grew in years, thoſe ſeeds came more and more to perfection: So that when we came to be men and women, we found ourſelves without

any ſenſible change from bad to good, to have a prevailing inclination to that which is good, and to bring forth all the fruits of the Spirit in our converſation. Now, in this caſe, here is all that which is meant by regeneration, tho' we have no notice when or how we came into this ſtate and condition. Nay, indeed, here is regeneration in that moſt proper and full ſenſe of the word, as I before gave an account of it; for here is both the outward regeneration of baptiſm, and the inward regeneration of the Spirit going along with it.

But then this, as I have ſaid, holds only as to thoſe perſons among us that have always liv'd virtuouſly and innocently, and have never fully departed from their baptiſmal vow. As for thoſe that either thro' the occaſion of a bad education, or by the abuſing a good one, have engaged themſelves in vicious courſes, and accordingly, from the time they came to years of diſcretion, have lived in a ſtate of ſin and ungodlineſs; theſe perſons are not yet in the regenerate ſtate, (if we ſpeak as to the inward ſpiritual part of it); and muſt, if ever they mean to be ſaved, ſome time or other, undergo a real change and transformation both in their principles, and their courſe of living.

The third queſtion I am to ſpeak to, is this; Whether the change that is made in a man's mind in regeneration, be always perform'd ſo perceptibly, that the man himſelf ſhall be able to give a particular account both of the time when, and of the manner how it was wrought in him.

In anſwer to this, I ſay, firſt of all, That this queſtion can only be put with reference to the perſons that

that have formerly lived a careleſs vicious life, and ſo muſt of neceſſity undergo a transformation of their principles and manners: For as for thoſe that have been well-diſpoſed from their childhood, from what has been ſaid before, it appears, that the queſtion is out of doors as to them; ſo that it cannot be found divinity ſo to lay down the nature of regeneration or converſion, as to make it neceſſary, in order to it, that every man ſhould be able to give an account of the beginning of it in himſelf.

But, Secondly; Even as to thoſe that have ſometimes been vicious, ungodly perſons, and now are ſo reformed, that they may have juſt hopes that they are in a good condition; even as to theſe, I ſay, it is not neceſſary that they ſhould be ſenſible of ſo ſudden or ſo extraordinary a change in themſelves, as to be able from ſuch a time, or ſuch a circumſtance, or ſuch a providence that happened to them, to date their converſion. My reaſon is this; It doth not appear that, ordinarily ſpeaking, eſpecially in theſe days of ours, the work of converſion or regeneration is wrought in a moment, or at once, but rather in ſome quantity of time, and by many degrees, ſtep by ſtep, little by little. Thoſe men that have lived in a courſe of ſin, (and all thoſe that are to be transformed, muſt be ſuppoſed to be ſuch) can hardly, I ſay, be imagined to put off their vicious habits on a ſudden, or in a moment; but there muſt go a great many actions, a great many trials, and endeavours, before that be accompliſhed: The old habits muſt, by diſuſe and forbearance, be weaken'd, before the man be capable of receiving new ones in the place of them; and that very thing will require great me-

ditation, and many acts of ſelf-denial and mortification. And even when a man hath done this, yet ſtill he is but in a diſpoſition to a new habit; but before that habit be effectually wrought in him, there will be ſtill more time required, more ſtudy, more reſolution, and more repeated acts of virtue; and this we find true by conſtant experience: As the poet obſerves of bad men;

Nemo repente fuit turpiſſimus, ——

None ever grew extremely wicked of a ſudden, but came to it by time and degrees; ſo it is of good men, (thoſe I mean that have once been bad, and come to good) they cannot in an inſtant leap from one extreme to the other, but muſt paſs thro' ſeveral intermediate ſtages and ſtates, before the virtuous principle hath prevailed over the vicious.

Now this being ſo, it is not reaſonable to think that every convert to holineſs and virtue ſhould be able to give an account of the preciſe time when he became a convert. He may, perhaps, if he has a good memory, and has uſed himſelf to recollect his paſt actions, he may, I ſay, be able to remember ſome of the great occaſions and motives that firſt prevailed upon him to alter his courſe of living; and he may remember what reſolutions he formed upon this, and what attempts he made, and what trials he underwent, before he became maſter of his purpoſe; how often he had been defeated in his good intentions, and had been overcome by temptations, and fallen back into criminal actions; ſo that he hath, in a manner, been forced to begin again.

I ſay, all theſe ſtrugglings and efforts, and various ſucceſs, or at leaſt a great many of them, he may remember;

member; and withal, what gradual advancements he hath made in virtue and religion, 'till that now at laſt he may with comfort reflect upon himſelf, and his own condition.

But now, let him remember theſe things never ſo well, yet ſtill it will be hard for him, after all this, to aſſign the preciſe inſtant when he became a convert, or the particular time when he might juſtly be ſaid to have paſſed from an unregenerate ſtate to the regenerate. Nay, perhaps, tho' he be a very good man; yet ſuch may his fears and jealouſies over himſelf be, that he is not aſſured that he is yet entered into a ſafe condition.

The point will be much clearer by putting this inſtance: A man languiſheth under a long tedious diſtemper of body; he uſeth many phyſicians; he follows their advice, but yet he doth not quickly mend: ſometimes he is better, and ſometimes he is worſe; but with time, and the ſtrength of nature, and good preſcriptions, and regularly uſing himſelf, and God's bleſſing upon theſe things, he doth by degrees get ſtrength, and recover of his diſtemper, and at laſt finds himſelf to be in a good ſtate of health.

This man now, that is thus recovered, can he be ſenſible of the preciſe time that he became a ſound man after his diſtemper? He can eaſily remember that ſuch phyſic was preſcribed him, and that he made uſe of it, and that, after ſome time, he grew better upon it; and, it may be, after that he relapſed, and, upon again conſulting his phyſicians, and following their directions, he overcame his relapſes; and after many pulls backwards and forwards, he thanks God that at laſt he is either perfectly recovered of his diſtem-

per, or in a very hopeful way towards it: All this now he is ſenſible of, and it is freſh in his memory; but yet I doubt he will be hardly able to name the punctual minute, no, nor the day, nor perhaps the week, when he could ſay upon good grounds, I am cured of my diſeaſe; I am a ſound man; I need not fear this diſtemper any more. His health came inſenſibly and gradually; and now, after he hath loſt all the ſymptoms of his ſickneſs, he may rejoice and hope well of himſelf; but it will be idle for him to ſay, Such an hour I became a ſound man: And yet much more idle would it be in him, either to be ſo confident of his health, as to lay aſide all fear of danger for the future, or, on the other ſide, to queſtion, or doubt of his health and good conſtitution upon this account, that he cannot name the time, or the manner, or the circumſtances, with which it was effected.

This inſtance is ſo pertinent to our purpoſe, and ſo plain, that I need not make any application of it to the caſe I have in hand.

I come therefore to the fourth and laſt queſtion upon this point, and that is, concerning the marks and ſigns of regeneration. This has been a great inquiry; and tho' I dare not ſay but that it is a very uſeful one, yet I doubt the anſwer to it has not always been ſuch as it ſhould be.

I fear that ſome perſons, by their over-great forwardneſs to multiply marks of converſion, or regeneration, have rather obſcured the thing, than clear'd it up; and have often brought needleſs ſcruples into mens heads.

The point doth really lie in a little room, and there requires no great learning nor ſubtlety to hit upon it.

The buſineſs of regeneration, as we now underſtand it, conſiſts in this; a hearty ſenſe of God, and the chriſtian religion, and a ſerious and conſtant endeavour to live ſuitably to that ſenſe, in all our converſation. So that if we will inquire for marks of a regenerate perſon, they ought only to be drawn from thoſe effects that a man feels in himſelf. If a man to his baptiſm, and his faith in Chriſt, and his profeſſion of the chriſtian religion, doth join a ſerious conformity to the laws of Chriſt in all his actions, and this out of conſcience, and as far as his knowledge, and the circumſtances of his life, and the natural infirmities of human nature will allow him; if he deſire heartily, and reſolve conſtantly, and endeavour ſincerely to pleaſe God, and to ſave his own ſoul, in all the ways of righteouſneſs, and ſobriety, and holineſs that the goſpel hath preſcribed to him; and theſe deſires, theſe reſolutions, theſe endeavours of his, have ſuch effects, as that, in the main of his life, after he is come to this his ſenſe, he lives innocently, and avoids open, and known, and wilful ſins; and as to what ſlips, and frailties, and omiſſions he may be guilty of, he is ſenſible of them, and begs God's pardon for them, and ſtrives againſt them, and ſtill rather grows better than worſe, more inclined to good, and more averſe to evil: This is the beſt mark in the world; nay, I will ſay, it is the only mark whereby one can diſcern that he is in a regenerate condition, in a ſtate of God's favour; and that if he ſhould die that moment, he is ſafe, as to his happineſs in the other world.

But the buſineſs of regeneration, by the multitude of marks that have been ſet upon it, has been ren-

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der'd a far more intricate and artificial thing than this comes to.

I cannot ſay, but that in moſt of the books and diſcourſes that do thus abound with marks, there is ſo much truth, that if they meet with a reader, or hearer, that can by experience find them all made good upon himſelf, he needs not much fear the being deceived by them, but may from them make a ſafe concluſion as to his own ſtate. But then there is this thing to be taken notice of, that thoſe numerous marks that are given of a regenerate perſon, (tho', if taken altogether, they muſt be true; yet they) ſeldom all meet in one perſon, and perhaps there are five to one of unqueſtionably ſincere chriſtians, that do not find them all to concur in themſelves; and yet, if you take them aſunder, and pitch upon ſuch and ſuch particulars of them, leaving out others, it is odds but they miſlead you, and prove no marks at all.

That which I would ſay, is this; There are theſe two inconveniencies in multiplying the ſigns and marks of regeneration; one is, That oftentimes ſuch marks are given of it, as that a man may be a very good chriſtian, and, without doubt, a regenerate perſon, and not find them in himſelf. Another inconveniency is this; That ſuch marks are likewiſe given, that even a bad man may experience them in himſelf, tho' ſome good men cannot.

To prove this by inſtance; There is nothing more uſual among thoſe that delight to lay down a great number of marks of converſion, than to frame a ſolemn deſcription of the manner of it, and to deliver the particular way and method in which it proceeds. And here uſually they firſt bring in a ſoul very careleſs

leſs and regardleſs of his eternal intereſt, and very ſecure in his own way, tho' it be a bad one: Afterwards they make this perſon, either by ſome convincing ſermon he hath heard, or ſome reaſonable advice he hath had from ſome pious friend, or by ſome affliction or judgment that God hath been pleaſed to viſit him with; or, laſtly, by ſome extraordinary providence in ſome other way; I ſay, by ſome or all of theſe means, to be deeply awaken'd to a ſenſe of his former ſins, and the dangerous condition he is in upon account of them. And the firſt effects that theſe warm convictions do work upon him, are very terrible; he thinks himſelf in a fearful damnable condition, he looks upon himſelf as a loſt undone man: He hath the terrors of the law ſo deeply ſet home on his ſpirit, that he can find comfort no where; and tho' he turn himſelf all ways imaginable, yet ſtill he is a forlorn, miſerable creature. After he hath lain ſome time under theſe terrors and affrightments, and even upon the brink of deſperation, it pleaſeth God, at length, by his Spirit, to break thro' this cloud, and to dart ſome beams of light and comfort into his conſcience. Finding himſelf to be loſt every other way, he is at laſt directed to fix upon Jeſus Chriſt, as the only anchor of his hope; to cloſe with him, to apply his merits and righteouſneſs to himſelf; and, upon this, he lays hold on the promiſes, and, renouncing all his own works, and all his own righteouſneſs, and perfectly going out of himſelf, he relies and depends upon Jeſus Chriſt, and him only. And thus cloſing with, and reſting upon Jeſus Chriſt, is that juſtifying, ſaving faith, upon account of which God accepts and approves of him.

But

But then he doth not reſt here, but goes farther; he is not only ſenſible of his former guilt, and takes ſhelter in the merits of Chriſt, for the forgiveneſs of it; but he reſolves moſt heartily to become a new man for the future.

This is the ordinary proceſs of converſion, as you ſometimes find it deliver'd in books. I do not repreſent it with a deſign to expoſe it; for really this is ſometimes the method by which men are converted: But yet this I ſay, that if this kind of proceeding be ſet down, either as a neceſſary mark, or as a certain mark, whereby men are to judge of their regeneration, it will fail in both theſe reſpects, and be found no mark at all; for it will either diſcover too much, or too little: For it is certain, a great many very pious religious perſons never came to that good eſtate they are now in, by any ſuch methods as we have now been ſpeaking of. They were never exerciſed in ſuch a boiſterous manner, with the terrors of the law (as they are called). They were never in ſuch a deſpairing condition. And that ſatisfaction, and peace of mind they now enjoy, and that good hope they have of God's favour, never arrived to them in ſuch a way and method as I have been deſcribing.

And then, in the ſecond place, theſe marks of regeneration cannot be conſtantly true ones; becauſe a great many may have felt in themſelves all that I have now mentioned, and yet fall ſhort of it. There is no doubt but a very bad man may have had all thoſe convictions upon his own mind of his ſin, and the danger we have now repreſented; nay, and all that diſclaiming his own righteouſneſs, and cloſing with Chriſt's promiſes, and applying his merits to himſelf, that

that we have mentioned; nay, and farther, all that abhorence of his own ways, and ſuch pious reſolutions as ſuch an abhorrence could work in him; and yet, for all this, he may not be a regenerate perſon: For, after all theſe convictions, and reſolutions, he may ſtill continue under the ſlavery of ſin, and evil habits. Tho' he had a warm ſenſe of religion at the firſt, yet that ſenſe, in tract of time, and upon the recourſe of temptations, may wear off and decay, and the man at laſt comes to ſatisfy himſelf, that if he do but ſtill reſt on Jeſus Chriſt, and now and then take ſolemn times for the exerciſing acts of repentance, and faith, and devotion, this will be accepted of God, tho' yet he lives in a courſe of ſin, and hath not truly mortified any one carnal or worldly luſt that formerly reigned over him.

God knows the world hath too much experience of the truth of this.

The whole I have to ſay about this buſineſs, is this; and I conclude with it:

It is not adviſeable for us to be curious about many works of our regeneration; or when we deal in books that treat of thoſe things, either to be much exalted, or much caſt down, when we find ſome marks there given, either to agree with our ſtate, or not to agree with it.

The trueſt mark is that of our Saviour, *The tree is known by its fruits.* If a man be baptized, and heartily believing the chriſtian religion, doth ſincerely endeavour to live up to it; if his faith in Jeſus Chriſt be ſo ſtrong, that, by virtue thereof, he overcomes the world, and the evil cuſtoms thereof: If knowing the laws of our Saviour, he ſo endeavours to conform himſelf

himſelf to them, that he doth not live in any known wilful tranſgreſſion of them, but in the general courſe of his life walks honeſtly and piouſly, and endeavours, in his whole converſation, to keep a good conſcience, both towards God and man; ſuch a man, however he came into this ſtate, and with whatever infirmities it may be attended, (of which infirmities yet he is deeply ſenſible, and fails not both to pray and ſtrive againſt them) yet he is a good man, and gives a true evidence of his regeneration; tho' he have not all the marks and qualifications that he may meet with in books.

And ſuch a man, if he perſevere in the courſe he is in, will, without doubt, at laſt be juſtified before God, and find an admiſſion into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt:

Whither God of his mercy bring us all, &c.

SERMON XIV.

In what ſenſe the Heart is deceitful; and what is the proper remedy.

JER. XVII. 9.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked; who can know it?

THE deceitfulneſs of the heart, is a thing we oft complain of, and with too great reaſon: But yet is often not rightly underſtood; and mens miſtakes about it have ſometimes brought upon them great inconveniences. Thoſe miſtakes have chiefly been occaſioned thro' the miſunderſtanding this text that I have read unto you; and therefore I have pitch'd upon that, rather than any other, for the ground of my diſcourſe upon this argument.

Five things I here propoſe to do:

Firſt; To clear up the ſenſe of my text, by ſhewing what ſort of deceitfulneſs of the heart is here ſpoken of.

Secondly;

Secondly; To examine the commonly-received doctrine concerning the heart's deceitfulneſs.

Thirdly; To give an account of thoſe effects, which are generally attributed to the deceitfulneſs of the heart, but indeed proceed from other cauſes.

Fourthly; To ſhew wherein the deceitfulneſs of the heart doth really conſiſt. And,

Fifthly and laſtly; To propoſe the proper cure and remedy of it.

Before I enter upon theſe points, one word by way of explication of what we mean by the heart, and what may be meant by its being deceitful; for as for all the other terms in my text, they are ſufficiently plain.

By the heart, may be underſtood, either that principle within us, from whence the motions, and deſigns, and affections of our minds do proceed; or we may underſtand by it, thoſe inward motions, and deſigns, and affections themſelves.

In both theſe ſenſes the heart is taken in ſcripture. In the firſt ſenſe our Saviour ſpeaks of it, when he ſaith, Matth. xv. 19. That *out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, murders*, and the like. And ſo where-ever we meet with the thoughts of the heart, the imaginations of the heart, in ſuch paſſages the heart is taken for the principle. In the other ſenſe God ſpeaks of the heart, in that paſſage, *This people draweth nigh to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.* And ſo where-ever we meet with ſpeaking truth from the heart, praiſing God with the heart, God's knowing the heart, and the like; in theſe paſſages the heart is taken for the actions and effects of that principle, the inward thoughts and

and affections, and inclinations. But this is so much a nicety, that it is scarce worth taking notice of; it is no matter in which of these senses we take the heart in the text, for indeed they come both to one thing.

As for the other term, deceitful, when it is applied to the heart, it is capable of two significations; it may either signify, that the heart is treacherous and fraudulent, and means to deceive, which is the proper sense of the word; or it may signify, that whether it means to deceive us no, we are apt to be deceived by it: Thus, in common speech, we say, a man is a deceitful man, not only when he designs to cheat us, or impose upon us, but when he fails us in that we relied upon him for, or when we can make no certain judgment of him.

Now it is true, the heart may be deceitful in both senses, but yet with different respects. The heart of another may deceive me both ways; that is, both by designing to abuse me; or, tho' he have no such meaning, yet by disappointing me, if I trust to him. But my own heart cannot be said to deceive me, save only in the latter sense; that is, I may make a wrong judgment of it, or may, by the event, be deceived as to the matter in which I trusted to it.

Having premised this, I come to my first inquiry; What is the prophet's meaning, when he saith, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked? Who can know it?*

Now as to that, I think these two things are pretty clear: First of all; That when he saith, *The heart is deceitful*, he means it in the proper sense of the word; that is to say, as it signifies fraudulent, false,

falſe, hypocritical, covering foul deſigns under fair pretences. This appears both by the word he here uſeth, (which is not capable of any other conſtruction;) and likewiſe by that other character of deſperately wicked, which he here joineth with it. Now, if this be ſo, then no mens hearts are deceitful in the prophet's ſenſe, but only the hearts of bad men, thoſe that deſign to deceive; and conſequently, there is no ground from hence to draw a general concluſion, that all mens hearts are deceitful, and deſperately wicked; for the hearts of honeſt men are not ſo.

Secondly; When the prophet ſaith of ſuch a deceitful wicked heart as this, *Who can know it?* It is impoſſible his meaning ſhould be, that the man whoſe heart it is, doth not, or cannot know it; for every one is certainly privy to all the deſigns of his own heart. But the meaning is, that other men cannot know it. The man's wicked intentions are ſo covered over with fair appearances, that none but God can ſee through his diſguiſe; as it follows in the next verſe, *I the Lord ſearch the heart.*

Now if this be the prophet's meaning, then it is plain, this text doth no ways relate to a man's knowing, or not knowing his own heart, but only to his not knowing the hearts of other men.

Taking now theſe two obſervations along with us, we have nothing more to do for the finding out the true meaning of this text, than only to conſider upon what occaſion it comes in.

The deſign that the prophet is here purſuing, was to beat off the Jews from placing their confidence in men, and to perſuade them to put their whole truſt in God, and to depend upon him alone for their future

ture preſervation. To this purpoſe he tells them, (as you may ſee in the 5th verſe) *Curſed be the man that truſteth in man, and maketh fleſh his arm, whoſe heart departeth from the Lord*, &c. *But bleſſed is the man who truſteth in the Lord, and whoſe hope the Lord is; for he ſhall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that ſpreadeth out her roots by the river, and ſhall not ſee when heat cometh, but her leaf ſhall be green*, &c. And then follow the words of my text, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and deſperately wicked; who can know it?* What can be the deſign of theſe words, but only to inforce what he had ſaid before, by giving a farther reaſon, why they ſhould place their hope in God, and not in men? And if we take them thus, an excellent reaſon they do indeed contain: For how vain is it to truſt in men, whoſe hearts we cannot ſee into; and who, tho' they may make a very fair ſhew of integrity and virtue, yet have often miſchievous and wicked deſigns at the bottom! Taking now the text in this view, the ſenſe of it is very plain, and that is this; That it is a fooliſh thing to make fleſh our arm, and to put our confidence in men; for how fair ſoever their outward behaviour towards us may be, and how kind ſoever their promiſes, yet their hearts are often deceitful and wicked, and it is impoſſible for us to know them.

This, as I take it, is the prophet's account of the deceitfulneſs and unſearchableneſs of the heart, but very different it is from the common opinion, which obtains concerning this point; which I now come, in the ſecond place, to examine:

The common opinion is; That theſe words are not ſo much to be interpreted of other mens hearts with

with reſpect to us, or of our own hearts with reſpect to other men, as of our own hearts with reſpect to ourſelves. And the doctrine drawn from them is this; That every man's heart is ſo treacherous and ſo unſearchable, that the man himſelf cannot make any judgment of it, as to its uprightneſs and ſincerity before God; tho' he think himſelf never ſo ſincere, he may be deceived, and be all the while an hypocrite. And this notion is carried ſo far, that, among ſome, it is made a mark of one's ſincerity, for a man to doubt of his ſincerity. Which opinion is apt to do miſchief two ſeveral ways: To ſome it may give encouragement to think themſelves ſincerely good chriſtians, when they are not; for, certainly, the leſs ſincere any man is, the more reaſon he hath to doubt of his ſincerity; and ſince all hearts are deceitful, why may he not be deceived as much in the judgment he makes of the bad ſtate of his ſoul, as he may be, if he ſhould entertain a favourable opinion of his own condition? On the other ſide, to many that are indeed ſincerely good chriſtians, this notion doth occaſion many unreaſonable fears and perplexities, and diſquiet of mind: For tho' their hearts do not condemn them for any thing, yet there is no comfort to be drawn from hence; for their hearts are deceitful, and may abuſe them; may ſpeak peace to them, when there is no peace.

But now this doctrine, as it hath no countenance from this text, (as I think I have ſufficiently ſhewn) ſo is it likewiſe contrary both to our own inward ſenſe, and to the holy ſcripture. Firſt, It is againſt the common ſenſe and experience of mankind. A man's heart, as I told you, is nothing elſe but the principle

principle from which his actions (as considered morally) do flow; it is a man's thoughts and designs, his inclinations and affections. Now, what thing in the world is there that a man can know, if he know not these? Every man is as sensible of the inward motions and dispositions of his soul, and knows as well what his thoughts are, what principles he is acted by, as he knows when he is hungry or thirsty, when he feels pleasure or pain, when he hears or sees this or the other object. When we transact any business, or drive on any bargain with men, we know whether we deal honestly and truly with them, or no: If we have designs of over-reaching them, or imposing upon them, they perhaps cannot discover it; but it is impossible we should conceal our designs from ourselves.

And as the matter stands with our own hearts as to men, so doth it also stand with them as to God Almighty. We all know well enough, (or at least may know, if we will but look into ourselves) how our hearts stand affected to virtue and goodness. We know what the designs are we drive on in our profession of religion. We know what acts of piety we perform out of an inward devotion, and what for the serving worldly ends. We know what sins we indulge against conscience, and what sins we do not. We know when our prayers are hearty, and when they are only formal and customary. We know when we break our resolutions, and when we keep them; when the main study and design of our lives is to please God; when to please ourselves, or to gratify our lusts. In a word; in all the instances of our conversation, we know whether we deal sincerely with

with God, or no: In theſe things our conſciences are as a thouſand witneſſes; and if we look into them, they will never deceive us; and if they did deceive us, there would be no ſuch virtue as ſincerity, nor any ſuch ſin as hypocriſy, in the world.

But, ſecondly; As this received opinion, That a man cannot know his own heart, is againſt our inward ſenſe and experience, ſo it is alſo repugnant to the holy ſcripture. There is nothing more uſual there, than to find the moſt holy men pleading and inſiſting upon their own uprightneſs and ſincerity; and this not only before men, but before God himſelf. Now, how could they be imagined to do this, unleſs they thought, at leaſt, that they knew their own hearts? David doth this twenty times over in his pſalms. Hezekiah, in his ſickneſs, is not afraid to ſpeak to God in theſe words; *I beſeech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy ſight*, 2 Kings xx. 3. Job ſtood ſo ſtedfaſtly on his own integrity, that whatever his friends ſaid to the contrary, he ſolemnly declares he would inſiſt on it 'till he died. St. Paul himſelf fetches a comfort and joy from this very topic; *This is my rejoicing*, ſaith he, *the teſtimony of my conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, I have had my converſation in this world.* The ſame St. Paul tells us, That *no man knows the things of a man, but the ſpirit of a man that is in him.* So that, according to him, the ſpirit of a man doth know his own affairs and concerns.

Laſtly; Nothing in the world can be plainer to our purpoſe than thoſe words of St. John, 1 epiſt. iii. 20,

20, 21. *If our heart* (saith he) *condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things: But if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* So that, if that apostle may be believed, it is our hearts condemning us, or not condemning us, upon which we are to ground our confidence, or no confidence towards God. The unavoidable consequence of which is, that we may know our own hearts, and be competent judges, whether we be sincere towards God, or no.

Well, but if this be so, how comes it to pass that so many are every day deceived in the judgment they make of themselves; some taking themselves to be good christians, and to have a right and title to God's favour, who are indeed far from it; others, who have no reason to doubt of their sincerity in God's service, yet are not able to entertain a good thought of themselves.

I cannot deny the matter of fact to be so as is here represented: But I answer, That the mistakes that both sorts of people lie under, do not proceed from hence, that they do not, or may not know their own hearts, but from quite different causes, of which I now come to give an account; and that is the third thing I proposed upon this text.

Now the true causes from whence, as I conceive, these kind of mistakes concerning a man's self (which are commonly attributed to the deceitfulness of the heart) do proceed, are chiefly these three; that is to say, either not sufficiently examining our own hearts: Or, secondly, A misapprehension concerning the terms that God hath required of us, in order to salvation: Or, thirdly, Some accidental indisposition of

temper, which renders us incapable of rightly judging concerning ourſelves.

Firſt of all; Perhaps a man doth not examine his own heart at all, or examines it very careleſly. Now, when it happens thus with a man, how can it be avoided but he muſt needs fall under great miſtakes concerning the ſtate of his ſoul? The caſe is here the ſame with that of a tradeſman, that will make a judgment of his temporal eſtate, without examining his books, without inſpecting into particulars, where he is a debtor, and where he is creditor. Is it not a hundred to one that ſuch a man makes a falſe eſtimate of what he is worth, and thinks himſelf either richer or poorer than really he is? But yet it doth not follow from hence that his books do deceive him; on the contrary, if he had ſearched them, they would have told him truly in what condition he ſtood towards all he dealt with. And thus it is with mens hearts; they are our books, and ſo are they ſtyled in ſcripture; and we ought to open them, and ſtudy them daily, and from them to judge of the account between heaven and us. But if we be negligent in this matter, if we will not be at the trouble of ſearching into our hearts and lives, but run on at random, and live by chance, and ſtill reſolve to hope the beſt, let us not blame our hearts, but our idleneſs, if we take up falſe opinions of ourſelves. Theſe books will be opened and examined at the great day; and then we ſhall be convinced, that we might have made a true judgment of our condition, if we would have taken pains to look into them.

But, ſecondly; Men often take up falſe notions and apprehenſions of the meaſures of virtue and obedience

dience that God requires of them, and make terms of ſalvation to themſelves which God never made. This is another cauſe and occaſion (and indeed the moſt common one of all) of our miſtakes in the judgment we make of our own condition, and which we too frequently, but very unſkilfully, attribute to the deceitfulneſs of our hearts. Some men think that a leſs degree of ſtrictneſs and holineſs will recommend them to God, than indeed will; and of theſe likewiſe there are different ſorts, according to the different ſchemes of religion men have framed in their own minds. Some think, if they be but free from groſs and ſcandalous immorality in their converſation, they are ſafe enough, tho' they live all their lives without an inward ſenſe of God, or religion. Others think, that a diſclaiming their own righteouſneſs, and intirely relying and depending upon the righteouſneſs of Chriſt, will, without more ado, ſecure their title to ſalvation. Others think, that a regular attendance on the outward worſhip of God, and now and then performing acts of repentance at the ſolem ſeaſons, when they receive the ſacrament, will give them a title to all the promiſes of the goſpel, tho' yet they never mortify their luſts, and vicious habits, which they ſo often repent of. A great many other forms of religion there are, with which men may cheat themſelves into a good opinion of their own eternal condition.

But then this ariſeth not from the deceitfulneſs of their hearts, but from the error of their underſtandings, which they have not taken care ſhould be rightly informed concerning the terms upon which God hath offered ſalvation to mankind in the goſpel.

The teſtimony of their own hearts concerning themſelves, is true enough; they are really as ſincere as they take themſelves to be, and have made all theſe attainments that they think they have: But then that degree of ſincerity, thoſe attainments, will not do their work; and here lies their miſtake. And as it is frequently thus with men that are apt to judge too favourably of themſelves, ſo it is alſo with thoſe that think worſe of themſelves than they ought to do. A great many good men are full of fears, and doubts, and perplexities concerning their condition, and that, without any reaſon in the world. But whence doth this happen? Is it becauſe their hearts give them a wrong account of themſelves? No, but becauſe they have ſet the terms of ſalvation, in their own minds, higher than Chriſt hath ſet them in the ſcriptures. They have taken up an opinion, perhaps, that there is no pretending to be a diſciple of Chriſt, unleſs a man live ſuch a perfect life of virtue and holineſs, that he hath even reſcued himſelf from the common and daily frailties which are incident to human nature. It is not enough with them to ſtrive againſt all ſin, and not to be guilty of any wilful one, unleſs they can alſo live ſo, as that their conſciences do not reproach them for any failure in their duty, or any actual tranſgreſſion of the laws of God. They cenſure themſelves as much for an omiſſion of their prayers, or for too free a meal, or for an haſty paſſion, or an indiſcreet word, or a careleſneſs and wandering in their devotions, and the like, as other people do for downright crimes and impieties.

Unleſs now theſe people could live free from all theſe defects and irregularities (which they will find

it

it a hard matter to do, ſo long as they converſe in the world, and are cloathed with mortal bodies) how is it poſſible, ſo long as they are under theſe miſapprehenſions, but they muſt think very hardly and diſconſolately of their condition? But then I hope nobody will ſay, that it is the deceitfulneſs of their heart, that is the cauſe of this wrong judgment they make of themſelves; but their miſapprehenſions concerning the meaſures of Chriſt's obedience. If their underſtanding were right in the matter, their hearts would no way deceive them, but would ſpeak peace to them.

But, thirdly; Another cauſe to which are owing the miſtakes of men concerning their condition, (tho' the deceitfulneſs of a man's heart ſuffers the blame of them) is often ſome accidental indiſpoſition of temper, that renders them incapable of making a right judgment of themſelves. This is viſible in thoſe that are afflicted with that which we call religious melancholy; which, tho' it be a diſeaſe of the body, yet ſo doth it affect the mind, that a man can no more, under that diſtemper, form a right notion of his own ſpiritual ſtate, than a man that is over-run with the yellow-jaundice, or looks through a coloured glaſs, can rightly judge of the colour of an object preſented to him; ſuch an one will paſs a judgment, not according to the truth of the thing, or the appearance it hath to others, but according to the impreſſions of thoſe colours, with which his eye is prepoſſeſſed. But now, tho' it thus happens to mens ſenſes, thro' a diſeaſe, or ſome other accident, yet I hope nobody will from hence draw this generaal concluſion, that the ſenſes of a man are ſo deceitful, that

he cannot rely upon the report they give in to him concerning outward objects. And as little reaſon is there to make the ſame concluſion concerning a man's heart, upon account that now and then the underſtanding is ſo deeply tinctured with melancholy, that he judgeth falſly of his own ſtate.

The truth is this; In the condition of ſeveral hypochondriac perſons, who, tho' they are truly devout towards God, and make it the buſineſs of their lives to recommend themſelves to him, and would not for the world do any thing that ſhould wound their conſciences; yet, ſuch is their infelicity, they are never ſatisfied with themſelves; they accuſe themſelves for every thing they think, or ſay, or do; nay, they are ſometimes ready to deſpair, upon account of the greatneſs of their ſins, many of which yet lie only in their imagination: But, God be thanked, theſe perſons are not the worſe for thinking themſelves ſo very bad; and though they cannot make a right judgment of themſelves, God will: But, in the mean time, theſe diſturbances of theirs do not at all reflect upon the ſincerity of their own hearts, any more than, as I ſaid, a man's having a diſeaſe, calls into queſtion the credit of the outward ſenſes, as to matter of taſte, or ſmell, or ſeeing, or the like.

And thus much on my third general point. But it will be ſaid, Is not the heart then in any ſenſe deceitful with reſpect to themſelves? I anſwer, Yes, it is: And in what ſenſe it is ſo, is the fourth thing I propoſed to give an account of. And, in my judgment, the deceitfulneſs of our hearts lies in this, That tho' they do not deceive us as to what they repreſent concerning the preſent poſture and ſtate of our

ſouls,

ſouls, yet they often deceive us in what they repreſent to us concerning our future behaviour, or the frame and diſpoſition we ſhall be in, ſome time hence. If we aſk them in what condition we are now at preſent, they will give us a faithful anſwer: But if we aſk them how long we ſhall continue in that condition, or whether we ſhall be in the ſame temper or diſpoſition a year hence; in that they do often impoſe upon us: So that, in this reſpect, we may truly apply to them the words of my text, (though the prophet meant them in another ſenſe) *The heart is deceitful above all things; who can know it?* And, in truth, this is all the deceitfulneſs our hearts are capable of, with reſpect to ourſelves. We often are of one mind to day, and of another to morrow. We eagerly at the preſent entertain this or the other deſign that is propoſed to us, and perhaps, for a while, we briſkly purſue it; but we are often, in as little time, weary of it, and, by degrees, quite let it fall to the ground.

I grant, this uncertainty in ourſelves, is ſometimes very commendable; for if we happen to chuſe amiſs at the firſt, it is but fit and juſt, as ſoon as we find our miſtake, that we alter our counſels and deſigns. But it is not only thus with us in the caſe of a raſh inconvenient reſolution, but in thoſe caſes where we chuſe moſt wiſely, and reſolve moſt deliberately, and purſue thoſe reſolutions for a time with the greateſt vigour and earneſtneſs imaginable; even then, tho' we can never find any cauſe to blame ourſelves for pitching on thoſe deſigns, yet do we quite let them drop, and take contrary meaſures. Have we not frequent experiences of men, who, upon the awaken-

ing of their conſciences by ſome affliction, or good advice from their friends, or ſome grievous inconveniency they have brought upon themſelves, do enter into ſolemn and ſtrict reſolutions to forſake that ſinful courſe of life they are engaged in; to leave off their drunkenneſs, for inſtance, or their whoredom, or the like, and to become ſtrictly ſober, and virtuous; nay, and do ſo firmly continue in thoſe reſolutions for ſome time, that they verily believe they ſhall never be guilty of thoſe ſins again; yet, upon the return of temptations, do, by degrees, loſe all their good impreſſions, and become as lewd and as diſſolute as ever they were before? So that you ſee there is no truſting of thoſe men, nor could they truſt themſelves. And as men are often thus deceived in their purpoſes of growing better, ſo are they as often in their purpoſes of not growing worſe. Some there are, who, tho' they make no great profeſſion of religion, or of ſtrict virtue, yet have ſuch a ſenſe of morality, or generoſity, (call it what you will) that they would abhor the thoughts of doing any baſe, infamous action; tho' they cannot pretend to be good, yet they will undertake you ſhall never find them bad men; you ſhall never take them in any practice that is unhandſome, or baſe, or apparently wicked; and certainly they are to be believed in what they ſay or think, ſo far as a man can promiſe for the future. But in this inſtance alſo the heart is deceitful, as well as in the former; they can no more tell, by their preſent inclinations, what degree of impiety they may at laſt arrive at, if they continue indulging any ſin, than others can tell, from their preſent good purpoſes, what progreſs they ſhall make in virtue: If

a man once begins to be wicked, there is no ſtep of wickedneſs he can ſtop at.

The caſe of Hazael, in the 8th chapter of the 2d of Kings, is very proper to this purpoſe; that hiſtory is uſually brought for an inſtance of the deceitfulneſs of the heart; and it is a remarkable one in that ſenſe of its deceitfulneſs we ſpeak of, but in no other. Hazael was a ſervant of the king of Syria, and was ſent by his maſter, when he was ſick, to the prophet Eliſha, to know of him whether he ſhould recover. The prophet, after he had given him an anſwer to his meſſage, applies himſelf to the meſſenger, and, weeping, told him what horrible miſchief he ſhould do, what ravages and deſolations he ſhould make among the Iſraelites in time to come. The man was very much amazed at the prophet's ſpeeches, and ſeriouſly anſwered, *Am I a dog, that I ſhould do this thing?* Without doubt he ſpoke what he thought; it never enter'd into his mind to have a hand in ſuch barbarities as the prophet ſpoke of, and therefore he might ſincerely declare his abhorrence of ſuch kind of practices. But yet, for all that, the prophet (as the event ſhewed) knew him better than he knew himſelf; for when he came to be king of Syria, he did really do all thoſe things, and was guilty of all thoſe inhuman cruelties that the prophet had ſpoken of. This is a remarkable inſtance of a man that thought himſelf honeſt, but proved notoriouſly wicked. And thus, I doubt not, it generally happens with all men that prove ſo; there are ſome times of their lives when they would tremble to think of ſeveral wicked actions, which afterwards they themſelves do commit, not only without remorſe, but with pleaſure.

But it will be ſaid, Is not, in the mean time, the condition of mankind very miſerable, that can neither rely upon their reſolutions to do well, nor upon their purpoſes not to do ill? I anſwer, It is no other condition than what is neceſſary for them, in order to the making them careful of their own actions: And if God hath endued us with liberty of choice, and given us a command over our own actions, and put us into a capacity of doing well, or doing ill, it muſt needs be thus with us. But yet there is this to be ſaid, to mitigate our own infelicity as to this point; and that is, tho' the heart of man be deceitful as to what is future, yet it is not equally ſo to all kind of perſons. There are ſome men may much better truſt their own hearts, than others can; nay, and if they do truſt them, they will rarely deceive them: It is a thouſand to one but their hearts will give them a true account of themſelves, even with relation to what is future: But then, as for others, that are in different circumſtances, there is no ſuch thing to be ſaid.

To give an account of this difference in men, as to the deceitfulneſs of their hearts, (I ſpeak with reference to their ſpiritual eſtates, as they ſtand to God and virtue, which is the only thing I have here to conſider) it will be needful to diſtinguiſh mankind into three ſorts.

There are ſome men that have got habits of virtue and goodneſs, have made it their buſineſs for a long time to ſerve God, and live in obedience to his laws. There are others likewiſe, that have got habits of vice and ſin, have a long time purſued a courſe of wickedneſs, have indulged all their ſenſual

luſts and appetites without any reſtraint, ſave only what their worldly intereſts have put upon them. There is likewiſe a third ſort of men, that are neither ſo much under the power of goodneſs, or the power of vice, but that they do, as it were, heſitate and deliberate to which of the two they ſhould give up themſelves: They ſeem to be in the confines of both, and ſometimes to incline to the one, ſometimes to the other, but have not fixed themſelves firm ſubjects to either.

Now, tho' the heart, as to what is future, may be deceitful, in ſome degree or other, in all theſe ſorts of men, yet it is abundantly more deceitful in the laſt, than in the two former. The firſt ſort, thoſe that have got habits of virtue, there is no great danger of their miſcarrying; and ſtill the leſs danger, by how much more thoſe habits are rooted and confirmed: They having, in a good degree, mortified all their corrupt inclinations, and uſed themſelves to a life of piety and virtue, will find that life ſo natural, ſo extremely agreeable to them, and the grace of Chriſt ſo powerful in them, that they ſhall not be able, without great violence to their own minds, to forſake God, and commit wickedneſs; it will be like putting a knife to their throats, or throwing themſelves into the fire.

As for the ſecond ſort of men, thoſe that are harden'd in ſin, God knows their ſtate is likewiſe too much fixed, either for themſelves, or others, eaſily to be deceived about it, unleſs perhaps in this reſpect, that they may arrive to a greater pitch of wickedneſs and degeneracy than ever they intended. If any judgment can be made of them, as to what is future,

ture, it is this; That if God do not in mercy awaken them, and rouſe them up by ſome eſpecial, extraordinary providence, they will grow worſe and worſe, and can never fix any bounds to their wickedneſs; for as the degrees of virtue are infinite, ſo are thoſe of vice too. So that, by this, you ſee they are the third ſort of men in which that deceitfulneſs of the heart we are ſpeaking of, doth generally take place. Thoſe that are not perfectly fixed, either as to virtue, or to vice; thoſe whoſe conſcience is ſo awake, that tho' it cannot always oblige them to do as they ſhould do, yet it doth ſeverely teſtify againſt them, if they commit any great ſin. Theſe men now are very uncertain; ſometimes they are altogether in a good humour, they are very ſorry for their follies, they are infinitely convinced that they ſhall be undone, to all intents and purpoſes, if they do not change their courſe of life; and accordingly they do ſometimes reſolve ſeriouſly to do it, and now and then make ſome attempts towards it. At other times they are quite off the hinges, yielding themſelves up to the ſway of their luſts and paſſions, and cloſing with every temptation that comes in their way. Now, where-ever men are in theſe circumſtances, their hearts are infinitely deceitful; and it is impoſſible for them certainly to know in what ſtate and temper of mind, as to God and religion, they ſhall be, in a month hence; and yet this is, I believe, the condition of the greateſt part of men. But yet, even of theſe men, there is ſome difference; according as they more or leſs approach to habits, either in virtue or vice, there is more or leſs truſt to be given to what their hearts tell them, as to their future behaviour.

This

This is, as near as I can gueſs, a true account of the deceitfulneſs of mens hearts, with reference to themſelves. All that now remains, is, in the fifth and laſt place, To ſay ſomething about the remedy of it.

Now, ſince it appears, from what has been ſaid, That our hearts deceitfulneſs is cauſed by our fluctuating, as it were, between virtue and vice; and that the nearer any one approaches to habits of goodneſs, the leſs deceitful will his heart be; it is plain, That the cure of this deceitfulneſs muſt conſiſt in the getting and increaſing ſuch habits; and therefore, whatever conduceth to that end, is a proper preſcription in this caſe. Now, for the obtaining habits of virtue, every one will ſee that theſe four things are abſolutely neceſſary.

I ſhall but juſt name them, and conclude.

Firſt of all; Serious and hearty reſolutions to break looſe from our ſins, and to live a holy, virtuous, and religious life, whatever pains or trouble it may put us to; and thoſe often repeated: not contenting ourſelves with reſolving now and then at a good time, but every day renewing our purpoſes, and devoting ourſelves to God, and his ſervice, and fortifying our minds againſt all thoſe difficulties and allurements that may be thrown in our way, to divert us from the good we have engaged ourſelves in.

Secondly; A conſtant care and watchfulneſs over ourſelves, and over all our actions, and eſpecially at thoſe times when we are in the view of temptations, then it will particularly concern us to ſtand upon our guard, and narrowly to attend the motions of our own minds.

Thirdly;

Thirdly; Frequent trials and exerciſing of ourſelves in the way of virtue. Every one knows, that an habit of any action is got by doing that action often: If we would get an habit of devotion, we muſt uſe ourſelves to ſay our prayers: If we would get an habit of meekneſs, we muſt take all occaſions of practiſing upon ourſelves, to ſuppreſs the anger and reſentments that ariſe in us upon any provocation. And thus as to all the other inſtances of virtue.

And let us remember this; That tho' every action of this kind may at the firſt be very troubleſome to us, and withal very imperfect; yet every time we repeat the action, we ſhall do it both with greater eaſe, and with greater perfection and ſatisfaction to ourſelves; and if we continue on in this repetition of our actions, we ſhall, in time, get the habit we deſire.

Eſpecially, in the laſt place; If, with all theſe things we join conſtant and fervent prayer to God, and a hearty faith in Chriſt, together with the uſe of thoſe other means that our religion doth recommend to us. Knowing the deceitfulneſs of our hearts, the weakneſs and inconſtancy of our tempers, we muſt fetch in other aids and ſuccours, beſides thoſe that we have in ourſelves, even the aids and ſuccours of the Holy Spirit of God, which he never refuſes to any ſoul that earneſtly prays for them, and endeavours to frame his life according to thoſe inſtitutions that Jeſus Chriſt hath laid down in the goſpel.

Theſe are the methods, which if we conſtantly practiſe, we ſhall undoubtedly grow in virtue and goodneſs; and our hearts will, by degrees, be ſo confirmed

confirmed in pious habits, that we ſhall not need to fear they will ever deceive us: But we ſhall go from ſtrength to ſtrength, 'till at laſt we come to appear before God in Sion, the heavenly Jeruſalem, not made with hands, where we ſhall for ever live in unſpeakable glory and happineſs.

To which place God Almighty bring us all, &c.

SERMON XV.

In answer to the objections against the Difficulties of Religion.

1 Epist. St. John V. 3.

This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.

IT is the latter part of this text I shall now beg leave to insist on, —*His commandments are not grievous.*

And I would to God we all thought so; for then more of us would set ourselves to keep God's commandments than now do!

Some have got such frightful notions of religion, that indeed they have not the courage in good earnest to engage in it: They look upon it as made for none but either the melancholy, or the miserable; such as are not framed in their tempers for the enjoyment of life; or such as, by reason of their unhappy

py circumstances, are incapacitated for them. With some it passeth, that the precepts of religion (as they are taught us in the holy scriptures) are impossible to be liv'd up to, and therefore it is in vain to trouble their heads about them. Others, that have consider'd the matter better, tho' they cannot say they are impossible, yet they are tempted to think they are very hard and severe; they are extreme rigorous impositions, and indeed unreasonable restraints upon human nature, and will put one to so much trouble and pain, and self-denial, that, in truth, if a man will scrupulously govern himself by them, he must not at all live like a man in this world, nor enjoy himself in the common gratifications, that, by the frame and constitution of things, seem to have been allowed to mankind.

Now upon such prejudices as these, that men have taken up, a great many, I fear, are mightily discouraged from ever seriously applying themselves to God and goodness; and, for these reasons, think themselves very excusable either for their making no profession of religion at all, or, if they do make such a profession, for their indulging themselves in such liberties as are altogether inconsistent with it.

I do not know how I can do greater service, in order to the recommending the serious practice of religion to you, which is my business at this time, than by endeavouring to vindicate it from these exceptions; by putting the proposition, here affirmed by the apostle, into as fair a light as I can; and shewing that those who frame to themselves such dismal apprehensions of a strictly pious and virtuous life, do proceed upon very false grounds; and that the duty

which

which God requires of us, is so far from being an intolerable or a grievous burden upon mankind, that, on the contrary, it is very light and easy.

This, I am sure, we have sufficient warrant, both from our Saviour, and his apostles, to teach and declare to all the world; whatever prejudices men may have entertained to the contrary. Our Saviour in expres terms hath told us, That *his yoke is easy, and his burthen is light:* And his beloved apostle St. John hath in this text declared, That *his commandments are not grievous.*

I am here far from denying, that there are difficulties in religion: It would be against the sense and experience of mankind to affirm there are none; nay, as things generally stand with mens corrupt nature and principles, it cannot be denied that it is more difficult, and will require more care and labour to be virtuous, than to be vicious. All the world must acknowledge, that going in the paths of virtue, is like going up the hill, it will put one to pains and intention of nerves: Whereas, on the other side, to live loosely and viciously, is such a descent, as the degeneracy of mankind, and the evil examples we have before us, have made very natural and easy to every body. But this, notwithstanding, we may safely affirm, that as the way of God and virtue is in itself a much plainer and easier way than that of vice and wickedness; so, all those things consider'd, that are to be put into the balance against our natural infirmities, and indispositions to virtue, it will be found, that a man shall need to take less pains to be very good, than to be very bad; that a man shall more consult his own ease, and pleasure, and satisfaction, by living

ing a religious, than an irreligious life. Nay, let the extremeſt hardſhips and difficulties that ever happen to any man that gives up himſelf a votary to religion, be taken into the conſideration; yet, for all that, it ought not to be accounted a ſevere or grievous impoſition, but an obligation upon us that is very natural, very eaſy, nay, and very delightful; *His commandments are not grievous.*

This is the point I am to maintain; and for the making it good, I ſhall proceed by ſeveral ſteps and degrees, and lay down my propoſitions; ſo that every one may ſerve both to confirm the truth of what we are now ſtarting, and alſo either obviate or anſwer the objections that are brought to the contrary.

And the firſt point I aſſert, is this; That religion is not an impracticable thing, as ſome men do ſuggeſt, but it is poſſible for us to live up to it. There is no man living can affirm, that there is any thing commanded by the laws of Jeſus Chriſt, (which, to us chriſtians, makes the whole of our duty, and the whole of our religion) but what every man in the world may, if he will ſet himſelf upon it, yield obedience to it. Take the hardeſt part of the chriſtian yoke, that is to ſay, forgiveneſs of enemies, doing good to our enemies, denying our worldly intereſts, and renouncing all we have (when God calls us to it) for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt; yet I hope there is nobody can ſay that theſe things are impoſſible, tho' they may be accounted very ſevere. Impoſſible they cannot be, becauſe a thouſand men have actually done all theſe things, and that upon far lighter motives and conſiderations than Chriſt's religion offers and propoſeth to us for the doing of them.

And

And if these things be practicable, why must we not think the same of the rest of the christian precepts, such as owning God for our creator, and continual benefactor; and as such, paying him our constant tribute of worship, and prayer, and praise, both in public and private; living in an humble sense of his almighty majesty, and our own unworthiness; using with temperance and moderation the good things he vouchsafes us; being honest, and just, and faithful in all our dealings; and shewing kindness, and good nature, and charity to all our fellow creatures; in a word, living righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present world? Do these things look so very formidable, that a man should shrink at the naming them? And cry out, Oh, these things are too hard for mankind! It is impossible we should live up to them! Why, I would fain know what rules for the government of our actions are practicable, if these be not? And yet these are the great hardships and impossibilities that, in the ordinary course of providence, will occur to us in the way of religion: These are the things in which our duty will principally lie, and in which we shall be exercising ourselves all our lives: And I dare say, not one of a thousand did ever meet with greater difficulties in the way of religion, than the practice of these things.

Ay, but it will be said, I have not fairly represented the matter; the impossibility of keeping God's commandments doth not lie in any particular instance of duty; for it cannot be denied, every precept of the gospel, singly taken, may be practicable enough; but the objection is, that our duty is impracticable in the whole; that is to say, the particulars

lars are ſo many, and the laws themſelves ſo ſtrict, extending both to our thoughts and words, as well as to our actions, that no man can attend to them at all times: So that it is impoſſible for any man ſo to order his converſation, but that, in ſome inſtance, or other, he will be a tranſgreſſor of God's laws, and that too perhaps every day; and conſequently, the duty required of us is too hard for us.

Why, if this be the objection, there is an eaſy anſwer to it. It was never intended, when we are giving an account of the poſſibility of keeping God's commandments, to leave out of the account the gracious allowances that God hath promiſed by Chriſt Jeſus, to make for the infirmities of human nature. Nay, indeed, whenever we lay down this general propoſition, That every man is indiſpenſably bound to keep all God's commandments; that propoſition is always to be underſtood in ſuch a ſenſe as to take in thoſe gracious allowances. If therefore we do but remember two things as to this matter, this whole objection perfectly vaniſheth.

The firſt is, That God Almighty, in the laws he gave us by Jeſus Chriſt, did never mean to tie us up to an exact and unſinning obedience to them: But, in the goſpel ſenſe, we are ſaid to obey God's laws, when we do our ſincere endeavours to obey them; when in the main of our lives, we live up to them; when we do not indulge ourſelves in any known wilful courſe of ſin; but, as much as we can, as far as our own weakneſs of nature, and the circumſtances of our lives, will permit, we do mortify our corrupt affections, and live holy and virtuous lives.

But,

But, ſecondly; Tho' we have not done this for the life paſt, yet there is ſtill a plank left after ſhipwreck. If we do but truly repent of our ſins paſt, how great, how heinous, and how long continued in ſoever they have been, (that is, ſo repent, as to forſake them); even in this caſe, we ſay, that ſuch a man keeps the commandments of God, and doth all that God requires of him; for he doth as much as God, under the goſpel covenant, hath promiſed he will accept, and reward a man for in the other world.

Now, this being the caſe, you ſee plainly, that all this talk of the impoſſibility of keeping God's commandments, and the urging of it as an exception againſt religion; as it is very impertinent, ſo indeed it is not fair dealing; for the laws of God require no more of a man than he can do; and whoever doth his honeſt endeavours to ſerve God as well as he can, ſuch a man (we will, without ſcruple, ſay) doth keep God's commandments, notwithſtanding any frailties and infirmities that may otherwiſe attend the courſe of his life.

Having thus cleared my way, I proceed a ſtep farther, and lay down a ſecond propoſition as to this matter; and that is this:

That as the commandments of God are not grievous, upon account that they are impoſſible; ſo neither are they grievous in this reſpect, That they are unnatural, or a force upon the conſtitution of mankind, (as thoſe whom we are now diſputing with object). Reſtraints indeed we do allow they are to the licentious practices of mankind, but not ſuch reſtraints as ought to be called invaſions or intrenchments

ments upon human liberty; becauſe, indeed, they are but the ſetting forth, or the marking out, of the true bounds of that liberty, as it is a perfection of human nature: Which bounds whoſoever tranſgreſſeth, he will be ſo far from being the eaſier, or the happier, for ſo doing, that he will be certainly miſerable.

As long as human nature is as it is, the happineſs of mankind can conſiſt in nothing elſe but in uſing their liberty, according to the beſt rules of reaſon; and thoſe we are ſure, are but another name for the laws of religion: And the very tranſgreſſing thoſe rules, tho' God had annexed no penalties to the tranſgreſſion, would of itſelf have found a ſufficient puniſhment. Every man that lives in a courſe of vice and irreligion, is ſenſible of this; he knows and feels that things are not with him as they ſhould be; he knows and feels that his mind is not at eaſe, is not right in that way that he is engaged in; becauſe he every day doth things which his reaſon cannot approve of. Now, whether this be not a ſufficient demonſtration, that the ways of virtue are ſuitable to our natures, and the way of vice and ſin contradictory to them, I leave any one to judge. In truth, a man may as well put the queſtion, which of the two is moſt natural and agreeable to a man's conſtitution, health or ſickneſs; as he can put it, whether virtue or vice be ſo.

Ay, but it will be ſaid; Is it not plain, that men are born with ſeveral ſtrong inclinations and propenſities to pleaſure, to wealth, to power, and greatneſs? and the like. And doth not religion put a terrible curb upon all thoſe appetites and paſſions? How

How then can you call the laws of it agreeable to nature?

Why, to this I answer; That as to all the appetites and passions that men are born with, of what kind soever they be, religion, as it is taught us in the gospel, doth not hinder the satisfaction of any of them. I do not know of any inclination that is truly natural, but what is allowed to be gratified, so long as it is done in proper instances, and due measure, so far as it is fit, and just, and reasonable: nay, so far as it really conduceth to the true pleasure and happiness of the person that is concerned. All that our religion forbids, is the irregularity and exorbitancy of our passions and appetites; and that we should not so humour them, as either to hurt ourselves, or to do injury to our neighbour, by the gratification of them.

These are all the restraints I know of, that the commandments of God put upon men as to these matters; and if so, judge you how terrible they are. But to put this matter out of doubt: If any man can make it a question, whether virtue or vice be the more agreeable to the frame of his nature; I would but desire him, for the resolving this question, to run over all the instances of our duty, as charged upon us in the scripture, and all the sins opposite thereto, and in his own mind compare them one with another; and then let him honestly pronounce sentence in favour of either, according as he finds which of the two will yield most peace, and ease, and quiet to his own mind, and will put him to the least labour, and trouble, and disturbance.

And I think theſe are certain marks by which a man may judge whether a thing be natural or agreeable to him, or no.

Now, I ſay, If a man will proceed by theſe meaſures, and run the parallel between all the virtues, and their contrary vices; as for inſtance,

Between meekneſs and patience on the one hand, and fretfulneſs, and peeviſhneſs, and diſcontent on the other:

Between love, and charity, and doing good, on the one hand; and hatred, and malice, and deſire of revenge, on the other:

Between chaſte and lawful love, and unlawful and adulterous luſts:

Between temperance and ſobriety in the uſe of God's bleſſings; and perpetual gluttony, and drunkenneſs, and revellings:

Between faith in God, and truſt in his providence and contentedneſs with a competency; and a boundleſs, unſatiable, avaricious deſire of riches:

And thus to all other particular virtues recommended to us by religion, and the particular vices contradictory thereto; I ſay, if a man will take this method in examining the things, and in judging as he finds, I dare be bold to ſay, there is no one living, but, upon ſuch examination, will readily pronounce, that in all the inſtances wherein our morals are concerned, thoſe that we call the virtues, are much more eaſy, much more natural, much more delightful, and will put us to abundantly leſs trouble and diſquietude, than the contrary vices.

Well, then! we are come thus far; The commandments of God are neither impoſſible to be kept,

nor are they hard or severe in themselves; so that they are not grievous upon either of those accounts.

But then it may be said, for all this, they may be grievous in another respect; because, as the corrupt state of mankind is, we have neither will nor power to set ourselves heartily to the keeping of them: Our own depravity, and the devil's temptations, are too hard for us; and then what doth the reasonableness of them, in their own nature, avail to us, (be it never so great) they being still beyond our strength.

For the removing of this objection, I lay down my third proposition, which is this: Let our natural inabilities, and our aversions to that which is good, be as great as they will; yet the supernatural assistance we may expect from God, for the carrying on of this work, will be sufficient, at least, to make the scales even. So that, notwithstanding those disadvantages, it will be as much in our power; and we shall be as much inclined to be good, as to be bad; to live in obedience to God's commands, as to live in contradiction to them.

When we talk of the possibility of obeying all the precepts of the gospel, and the very great reasonableness of them in themselves, and their agreeableness to our natures; yet we do not think these two points alone sufficient to counterbalance the very great propensity we have, in this corrupt degenerate state, to pursue the ways of vice and sensuality. Alas! we must needs acknowledge, that we are not only very weak, and impotent, but there seems to be a strong bias clapt upon our natures, which renders us averse to spiritual things, and too prone, God knows, to run into actions that we should not; and all this, besides the

the temptations we meet with from without. But then, on the other ſide, if we conſider that God is never wanting to any man, and that he is always ready to ſupply, by his immediate grace, what is defective in our natures: When we conſider that one of the great benefits which Chriſt hath purchaſed for us, is the gift of the Holy Ghoſt, by the help of which every man may work out his own ſalvation, may do all that God requires of him, in order to his future happineſs; and not only do it, but do it eaſily: When we conſider that there is no man, that is baptized into Chriſt's religion, who means honeſtly, but hath God's promiſe to be continually aſſiſted from above with his divine power and grace, whereby he may be enabled to do thoſe things which by nature he could not do: Nay, that this power of Chriſt, this virtue of the Holy Ghoſt in our hearts, is there lodged as a principle to tempt and invite us to be good, and to bring off our minds from every thing that is evil: That the Holy Spirit is within us as a ſolicitor of God's cauſe againſt the ſuggeſtions of the devil, and our own corrupt hearts; and that he is certainly as powerful and as ready to do us good, as our adverſary can be to do us harm:

I ſay, If theſe things be conſidered, ſure we ſhall be perſuaded that the work of religion is not ſo difficult, ſo hopeleſs an undertaking, as we are apt oftentimes to imagine it: *They that are with us, are more than they that are againſt us.* Tho' the devil, and our own corrupt natures, may tempt us ſtrongly one way; yet the Spirit of Chriſt, and his inviſible attendants, that pitch their tents round about us, do incline us as much the other way. Nor can there be any ſnares

laid for us by the wicked one, but what, by the aſſiſtance of this inviſible ſpiritual army that fights for us, we ſhall eaſily break, and overcome. That divine Spirit that dwells with all chriſtians, and even where he doth not dwell, (becauſe he is not entertained) yet deſires there to dwell, and fails not to be often preſent, and to prompt unſteady ſouls to that which is good, to ſolicit them continually with his holy motions, that they would ſeriouſly engage in the ways of Chriſt; I ſay, ſurely this Holy Spirit, by his powerful influences and aſſiſtances, will ſo make amends for the weakneſs of our natures, ſo ſmooth the ruggedneſs of our ways, ſo quell the force of the devil's temptations, that, if a man do not wilfully betray his own ſuccours, he will find himſelf as prevailingly carried on to the practice of all virtue and holineſs, as he can be to live a diſſolute, careleſs, and vicious life. And this is my third conſideration.

But, fourthly; This ought alſo farther to be acknowledged in this argument, That tho' there be great difficulties in religion; tho', as the temper of mankind now generally ſtands, it is much againſt the grain to ſerve God, and live in obedience to his commandments; yet theſe difficulties are chiefly occaſioned by our prejudices, and evil habits, by our being uſed to a contrary courſe of life: But then we are to remember, that, in a little time theſe difficulties will wear off, and we ſhall find, after ſome trial, that a life of ſincere religion and devotion will be far more natural, and more delightful, than any courſe of ſin that we were formerly engaged in.

The truth is, If we look upon the averſions and indiſpoſitions of moſt men to virtue and goodneſs, we

ſhall

ſhall find that they proceed from their former vicious habits. Men have long been uſed to a contrary courſe, and that makes them that they cannot bear with the ſtrictneſs of religion. Now, upon this account, I muſt needs own, that religion is ſomething troubleſome and difficult; and ſo much the more, by how much the more rooted and inveterate thoſe habits or cuſtoms are. Here therefore, chiefly, are we to lay the grounds of whatever uneaſineſſes or hardſhips we meet with in the ways of God. When it happens that vice gets the firſt poſſeſſion of us, (as God knows it doth in the generality of men) and that poſſeſſion is ſtrengthen'd by many actions of our own choice, and by that means ſin grows cuſtomary, and becomes, as it were, a ſecond nature: Why, in this caſe, all the world muſt acknowledge, that it will be no eaſy matter to expel it, and to ſubſtitute virtuous habits in the place of it; the doing of that, will require labour, and pains, and time, and perhaps alſo much ſtruggling, and ſelf-denial.

But then we are to remember, that this is only for a ſhort time; it is only upon our firſt entrance into a religious life, our paſſage from the one extreme to the other. For, after we are once paſſed the pangs of the new-birth, after we are a little inured to the ways of virtue, and have made ſome tolerable progreſs in it, it will become very pleaſant, and very eaſy: For I reaſon thus; If cuſtom and long uſage have ſuch a ſtrange power, as to make vice and ſin (which are the moſt contrary to our natures of all things in the world) not only ſupportable, but alſo ſweet and pleaſant to us; then, ſure, much more will the ſame cuſtom and uſage make virtue ſo; than which, as we have ſeen,

nothing is more agreeable, more natural, to the minds of men. There is no doubt but, after we have once broken the strength of our evil habits, and, by the exercise of religion, purged our souls of their fantastic and diseased appetites, and recover'd them to their native taste and relish; I say, there is no doubt but we shall find as much sweetness and delight in the ways of virtue and piety, as ever we did in the ways of sin. Our aversions to them will also be gone; and we shall rather wonder at ourselves, how we came to be so wretchedly imposed upon by the false appearances of vice. We shall then acknowledge that we never 'till now enjoyed our true liberty; and shall rather chuse to die, than to return to that hard bondage we before served in to sin and satan. In a word; All the difficulties we meet with in the first steps of our religious course, will then vanish, and our way will lie plain and smooth before us, full of pleasure, and full of peace, as Solomon describes it.

But to proceed to our fifth particular, which ought to be represented upon this occasion: In the fifth place, whereas it is urged against a life of religion, that there is much pains and watchfulness required to it; we see that this is so far from being a real difficulty or inconvenience, that really it is but the natural effect of our make and constitution. We cannot possibly be happy but in motion; and therefore, to charge this as a hardship in religion, that it sets our wits at work, that it exercises our diligence, is a very unreasonable thing. We readily grant, that the way of piety, as it is taught us by our Saviour, will call for great care, and watchfulness, and application: Whoever will be a good christian must not think to be idle,

but

but will find it needful to be very attentive to his work, and to be much upon his guard, eſpecially at the beginning; nay, and after he has made ſome conſiderable attainments in virtue, he will ſtill find work enough to employ himſelf about: And, upon this account, we cannot deny, but that the gate that leadeth to life is a very ſtreight gate; and they that mean to enter into it, muſt not only ſeek, but ſtrive, as our Saviour expreſſeth it; they muſt *work out their own ſalvation*; they muſt *give all diligence to make their calling and election ſure*, as St. Paul words it.

But then all this, we ſay, is no real difficulty in the matter. All this is nothing but a due and natural exerciſe of our powers. It is impoſſible a man ſhould live according to his nature, that is not, for the moſt part, intent upon ſomething or other: The chief pleaſure of his life conſiſts in conſtantly purſuing ſome deſign; and to live ſluggiſhly and without care, as it is the way to dull and decay our natural powers, ſo it is very uneaſy to a man that uſeth that courſe of life. There is no man but will find a great deal more pleaſure in being buſy, eſpecially when he hath a good buſineſs in hand, than in ſitting ſtill, and having nothing to do: This is ſo eſſential to our natures, that I ſcruple not to ſay, that it is one of the main ingredients of our happineſs, not only in this life, but in the next. The ſtate of heaven will chiefly conſiſt in this, in having our natural powers exalted to the utmoſt pitch of vigour and activity they are capable of, and being always employed in the contemplation and the purſuit of the beſt and nobleſt objects.

That which makes any man uneaſy in labour, is not his being buſy and intent upon a thing, but his

spending himself upon such things, or in such ways, as are no ways agreeable to him; as for instance, when he is either employed in such exercises as do more than ordinarily exhaust his animal spirits, and bring great heaviness and languor upon him; or, when he lays out his pains upon that which no ways suits with his humour, and temper, and genius: or, lastly, when he hath such a business in hand, that he hath no prospect of bringing it to good effect, but his labour seems likely to be lost upon it.

But now, the diligence and application, that we must use in this matter of virtue and religion, (let it be otherwise as great as you please) yet hath none of those inconveniencies attending upon it; since it neither puts us to much bodily pain, nor brings any great weariness, or consumption of spirits on us, nor is any way against the constitution or frame of our natures, but exceedingly agrees with it: Nor, lastly, is a hopeless and desperate undertaking, but such a design, as that every one, who will go about it, may assuredly promise to himself success in it.

I say, this being the case of a virtuous life, no man ought to think, that the diligence he useth about it is uneasy or troublesome, but rather the natural exercise of that heat, and briskness, and vigour that is put into the temper of every man. And he that doth not thus spend himself, must either let his powers lie idle and unemployed, and live the life of a plant, that is, only receive nourishment, and grow in bulk, without any action; or if he do stir, and busy himself, it must be in such other ways as are indeed more troublesome and unagreeable to his nature. It is the great advantage and excellency of a religious life, that it will always

ways employ us, and find us ſomething to do; ſo that we ſhall never grow ruſty and dull in our ſouls, nor ever complain that time lies upon our hands: It will quicken our diligence and induſtry, even as to the proſecution of our ordinary ſecular affairs: It will make us wonderfully ſolicitous to ſpend as little a portion of our lives unprofitably as poſſibly may be: But the great thing of all, is, it will mightily inlarge our powers, and, with them, our deſigns: We ſhall enter into a new world of objects, which we little thought of before; and about thoſe objects, as they are greater or leſs in worth or value, will our diligence proportionably be employed; and the more ſhall we wear off that ſluggiſhneſs and ruſt that a courſe of vice doth naturally contract; and the great pleaſure of our lives will be, that our will, our love, our deſires are unweariedly carried out after that which is good, and are daily more active and vigorous in the proſecution of it, till at laſt it will be tranſlated into a ſtate of everlaſting, never-ceaſing activity.

A ſtate of reſt, indeed. the ſcripture calls it, and it is ſo in one reſpect; for there we ſhall reſt from all our griefs and ſufferings, from every thing that can create trouble or torment to us: But yet, for all that, it is moſt truly a ſtate of everlaſting motion and activity; for then our ſouls being diſengaged from the clogs and incumbrances of theſe earthly bodies, we ſhall awake as agile and vigorous as the light itſelf, and ſpend the whole eternity not in gazing and ſitting ſtill, as ſome are apt to fanſy, but in exerting our powers and faculties perpetually to the nobleſt purpoſes poſſible; namely, in loving God, in ſearching into his wonderful works, in being enraviſhed with

all his wise contrivances, in continually singing praises to our great and good Creator and Redeemer, and in doing all the kind offices we possibly can to our fellow-creatures; and this without any weariness and decay of spirit, but with perpetual alacrity and pleasure, and joy; which indeed I take to be the greatest gem in that crown of righteousness which shall be bestowed upon believers at the last day. So that, really, that care, that industry, and watchfulness which religion in this life puts us upon, is not a thing that ought to be accounted as matter of objection, but rather as that which tends to the increase of our happiness, and makes us enjoy ourselves the better. That is the sum of the fifth point.

But then, sixthly and lastly, to come to a conclusion, there is this also to be added, which of itself alone (tho' there should have been little force in what has been hitherto said) will be of weight enough to make out the thing I am to prove; and that is this:

Let all the hardships and difficulties of religion be magnified as much as we please, yet the mighty motives and encouragements we have from the gospel of Christ to undertake that way, will very much outweigh them.

We have acknowledged all along, that there are difficulties in the christian life; difficulties that arise both from the strictness of that rule we are obliged to walk by, but more especially from that averseness we have to it thro' our being engaged in contrary practices. But let us also suppose that there are yet greater difficulties in a religious life; let us admit, that to enter upon this course is the readiest way to spoil all our temporal designs, and to ruin us as to all our hopes in this

this world; let us admit, that nothing but reproach, and ignominy, and perſecution will attend us, if we engage in this courſe of life: Yet, I ſay, admitting all this, a life of virtue and religion, will, notwithſtanding, to a conſidering man, be far more eaſy and far more eligible, than the contrary way of living, tho' it have never ſo many outward ſecular advantages to recommend it.

Let us put the caſe, that a man cannot do his duty to God, without being reduced to the utmoſt ſtreights, and greateſt extremity; (which yet, God be thanked! is not now true among us, nor have we any reaſon to ſuppoſe ſuch a thing) but ſuch things may come upon us, and therefore let us put the caſe:

Why, I ſay, let the worſt come to the worſt, yet, ſtill, all things conſidered, what God requires of us, is no hard, no grievous impoſition, upon theſe three accounts: I ſhall juſt name them, and ſo leave them, becauſe I doubt I have already too much exerciſed your patience.

Firſt of all; let the difficulties of religion be never ſo great, yet we have God's promiſe, that he will ſtand by us, and enable us both to ſupport them, and to overcome them, if we ourſelves be but honeſt. The apoſtle hath, in God's name, aſſured us, that no temptation ſhall ever happen to us, but either ſuch as is common to men; that is, ſuch a temptation as a man is ordinarily expoſed to, and may and doth as ordinarily overcome: Or if they be extraordinary temptations; yet, of what kind ſoever they be, God will provide us a way to eſcape out of them; at leaſt, we ſhall be able to bear them: *For God is faithful, and will never ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

Thus

Thus Saint *Paul* encourages us, in the xth Chap. of the 1st Epist. *Corinthians*, Ver. 13.

And thus much we may certainly gather from his words, that be the trials and difficulties we are exposed to, great or small, ordinary or extraordinary; be likewise our strength and courage, to our thinking, never so unequal to them, yet God will never lay any thing upon us, but what he will give us strength to go thro' with. And if we be fortified and enabled to vanquish the temptations, it is all one whether we be tempted, or no: Or rather, to speak truly, it is much better for us thus to be tempted; since, by our overcoming the temptation, we prepare to ourselves a great degree of rewards in the other world.

But, secondly; tho' our religion were attended with very great difficulties, yet is there nothing in that peace of conscience which every good man enjoys, while he pursues honest and virtuous ways, for the smoothing those difficulties? Is not the inward comfort, and satisfaction, and joy that a man reaps from discharging his conscience, and doing his duty, even then when he is persecuted for it, of some force to alleviate all the outward pressures and afflictions he undergoes on that account? Sure it is.

I would gladly ask any man living, whether a man that lives in all outward prosperity, hath every thing according to his own heart's desire in this world, and yet is a knave, or an hypocrite, and hath the stings of a guilty conscience perpetually pursuing him; or an innocent virtuous person that suffers mightily in this world, but yet his mind reproaches him with nothing that he hath done, but he hath a continual feast of a good conscience, as *Solomon* phraseth it; I say, I would

would aſk any one, whether of theſe is more to be pitied? I dare ſay, all will agree, that the former outwardly happy man is much the more miſerable and and pitiable of the two.

But, thirdly, to conclude; if to this we add the mighty unſpeakable rewards that are promiſed to all faithful perſevering chriſtians in the world, and the ſad portion that doth await all wicked ungodly men; let the difficulties of religion be never ſo great; let the croſs and perſecution they ſuffer for it be never ſo ſevere; yet there will be no compariſon, no competition between ſin and virtue, which of them is the eaſier, and which of them moſt recommends itſelf to the choice of mankind.

Let our condition in this world be never ſo happy and proſperous, yet is it an eaſy matter for us to think of dwelling in everlaſting burnings? Can we for a little bravery and ſplendor, a little pleaſure and gratification of our brutiſh appetites, which we are not certain will laſt for a year, or a month, or a day; I ſay, can we for this venture, (no, it is not a venture) can we for this ſell our ſouls and bodies to the devil, to be for ever tormented? Is this a bargain that we can any way pleaſe ourſelves with the thoughts of? On the other ſide, if we be ſincere lovers of God, and the diſciples of our Lord Jeſus, in what miſerable circumſtances ſoever we are in the world, will it not be ſufficient to revive our drooping ſpirits? Will it not be a cordial to us, in the midſt of all our afflictions and tribulations, to think that we are the ſons of the moſt High God, and that we ſhall be glorified with our Saviour, when he comes to appear triumphantly in the view of angels and men, to diſtribute his

his rewards to all his faithful servants; and that for our light affliction that endureth but for a moment, we shall receive a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?

Sure these things will not bear a comparison. But every one that hath his wits about him, must, out of the evidence of truth, be forced to cry out, that, all things considered, it is more easy, more safe, more desirable, more delightful to be good, to serve God, to live in obedience to his laws, and to discharge a good conscience, than to enjoy all the pleasures of sin, which are but for a short season.

May God Almighty, by his Spirit, convince us all of the truth of this! And upon that conviction, may we all seriously apply ourselves to the mortification of all our sinful habits, and to the study and pursuit of that which is good! That so we may have the comfortable effects of our labour in this life in solid peace and tranquillity of mind, and the glorious rewards that God hath made over to all good men in the life to come, by Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.

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SERMON XVI.

Concerning man's conſcience, when it is good, and when not.

HEBREWS xiii. 18.

——*We truſt we have a good conſcience, in all things willing to live honeſtly.*

THAT every one of us may be able thus to ſay with St. *Paul*, ought to be our moſt ſerious endeavours, becauſe it is our higheſt concernment. To have a good conſcience, is the greateſt duty, and the greateſt felicity in the world; as, on the contrary, an evil conſcience is the worſt of calamities. Upon our conſcience being good or bad, depends all the happineſs or miſery of our lives, both as to this preſent ſtate, and that which is to come: *He that hath a good conſcience hath a continual feaſt*, as *Solomon* expreſſeth it: He hath that which gives reliſh to all his enjoyments, and comfort and ſupport under all his misfortunes; that which makes him pleaſant and joyful in good circumſtances, and at leaſt contented in the worſt; and, which is more than all this, he hath that which

is both the evidence and the anticipation of a future glorious immortality. As, on the other ſide, an evil conſcience is both a man's crime, and his tormentor: It is that which makes him hated of God, and of himſelf: It is that which ſpoils and imbitters the moſt proſperous fortune in the world, but makes all afflictions intolerable; but, as if all this was too little, as it puts us out of the favour of God in this world, ſo without repentance, and putting it away, it excludes us from all hopes of his favour in the world to come. Happy therefore are they that can ſay with St. *Paul*, in the text, *We truſt we have a good conſcience.*

But what is it that makes a good conſcience? That is our preſent inquiry. Conſcience, taken in general, is nothing elſe but a man's judgment or perſuaſion concerning moral good or evil, or concerning what he ought to do, and what he ought not to do, and what he lawfully may do.

Now according to this definition of conſcience, one at the firſt ſound of the phraſe, would perhaps be apt to think, that that ſhould be a good conſcience, wherein a man's judgment was rightly and truly inſtructed as to theſe matters; that is, where he had right notions of duty and ſin, lawful or unlawful; as, on the other ſide, that ſhould be a bad conſcience, where a man was miſ-informed, and miſtaken in his notions about theſe points: But we muſt have a care of talking thus; a good conſcience or a bad, carries a great deal more in it than this comes to.

When a man hath true notions of his duty, or of what is lawful or unlawful, we ſay that he hath a right conſcience; but we do not ſay he hath a good conſcience upon that account. And ſo, where a man is

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misinformed as to the goodness or badness of an action, that we call an erroneous conscience; but it doth not therefore follow, that it is always an evil conscience. Again; as to this business of a good conscience, we must also distinguish between acting with a good conscience, and having a good conscience: For as these terms are commonly used, there is a great difference between them, just as much as there is between a single action, and a course of life. Thus a man is said to act with a good conscience, when he performs any particular action as he judges he ought to do, so that his conscience doth not reproach him for that fact. But now to have a good conscience, is quite another thing, and respects not only this or the other particular action that a man doth, but the whole course and tenor of his life. A man may act with a good conscience in twenty instances, and yet not have a good conscience; because he may not have the same care of all his actions that he hath of some of them.

Well, but what is it then that makes a good conscience? Or, how shall a man know when he hath it? Why, for the resolving of this, I think we cannot have better directions than the apostle's words in the text; *We trust* (saith he) *that we have a good conscience, being in all things willing to live honestly:* Which is as much as if he had said, Our being willing in all things to live honestly, is that from whence we conclude that we have a good conscience. So that, according to him, that is the rule and standard whereby a good conscience is to be measured.

But what is it to live honestly? Why, every body knows the meaning of that phrase: It is to frame our lives according to the laws of virtue and religion; it

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is to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live righteouſly, ſoberly, and godlily in this preſent world. And, in the ſecond place, to be willing to live honeſtly, doth import, not only a bare wiſh, or ineffectual deſire ſo to do, but a moſt ſerious, ſettled, and conſtant reſolution and endeavour throughout the courſe of our lives. And then, laſtly, this reſolution and endeavour to live honeſtly muſt be univerſal, not only in ſome inſtances or things, but in all things: *In all things* (ſaith the text) *being willing to live honeſtly.*

This then is the great thing whereby we can evidence to ourſelves or others, that we have a good conſcience; namely, our ſincere reſolutions, and our conſtant endeavours to approve ourſelves to God and man, by a holy chriſtian converſation.

This is the very account that the ſame St. *Paul* gives us of this matter, in other paſſages of his writings; *This* (ſaith he) *is our rejoicing, the teſtimony of our conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, we have had our converſation in the world. And herein* (ſaith he) *do I exerciſe myſelf to have a conſcience void of offence towards God, and towards man.* And, laſtly, to name no more ſcriptures, that which St. *Peter* in the 1ſt epiſtle, and the iiid chapter, in the beginning of the verſe, calls *a good conſcience*; he doth in the end of the verſe, explain by *a good converſation in Chriſt*; or *a good chriſtian converſation.*

But now, for the more particular explication of the nature of a good conſcience, and for the better enabling us to examine ourſelves whether we have it or no, I ſhall here do two things:

Firſt; give an account of what things are not required to the having a good conſcience; or, which is the

the ſame thing, what imperfections and ſins are conſiſtent therewith. And,

Secondly; what things are required to a good conſcience, and what ſins are inconſiſtent with it; and this ſhall be my work at this time.

I begin with the firſt point, What things are not required to a good conſcience; or, what imperfections and ſins are conſiſtent therewith. And here we ſay, firſt of all, it is not required, to the having a good conſcience, that a man ſhould be free from all errors, and miſtakes of judgment, in matters of religion, or in matters that concern his duty. Every man is indeed bound to apply himſelf with all ſerioufneſs, according as he hath ability and opportunity, to the learning of divine truths, eſpecially ſuch truths as do more immediately concern his practice. But yet, after all endeavours, tho' they be performed with great integrity, it is not only poſſible, but frequently ſeen, that good men are ignorant of many things, and miſtaken in many things, and this without any prejudice to their ſincerity. A man may be moſt heartily willing and reſolved in all things to live honeſtly, (which St. *Paul* here makes the meaſure of a good conſcience) and yet entertain a great many falſe opinions of things, and things too that relate to the very practice of religion.

I would not here be thought to patronize or defend any man's errors or miſ-perſuaſions in religion: But this I ſay, a great many errors (nay, tho' they may, in ſome ſenſe, be ſinful errors) may conſiſt with a good conſcience, becauſe certainly ſins of ignorance may. But now, to make any error or miſ-perſuaſion in religion, an innocent miſtake, or, at moſt, a ſin of ignorance,

norance, there are theſe three things required, which I ſhall but juſt name; only be pleaſed to take notice, that I here ſpeak of ſuch errors and miſ-perſuaſions as are incident to men that profeſs chriſtianity.

Firſt; it is required, that they be not ſuch errors as are deſtructive of the chriſtian religion; ſuch opinions and perſuaſions as ſubvert and overthrow the foundation of faith, or any part of it. Miſ-perſuaſions of this kind are not only ſimple errors, but hereſies; and ſo far as any man falls into them, ſo far he forſakes his chriſtianity, departs from the faith of Chriſt; which none can be ſuppoſed to do in a chriſtian church thro' pure weakneſs of underſtanding, but thro' groſs corruption and malice in the will. And therefore it is, that Saint *Paul* reckons hereſies amongſt the works of the fleſh.

Secondly; to make any error or miſ-perſuaſion conſiſtent with a good conſcience, it is required, that it be not ſuch an error as engages a man in any apparently ſinful or ungodly practice. If a man's opinion be ſuch, that it puts him upon carrying on deſigns, and doing actions, that are plainly and openly contradictory to the laws of God, or the common rules of honeſty and morality; this opinion, how ſtrongly ſoever it is believed, is not an innocent miſtake, but a piece of wickedneſs in the man that holds it. For the principles of virtue and honeſty, and morality lie ſo plainly and convincingly before every man's conſcience, who hath been uſed to think, that he muſt be wilfully blind that doth not ſee them; and conſequently, not ſo ſincere as he ſhould be, that will eſpouſe any tenet that ſhall give him liberty in his practice to contradict them.

But,

But, thirdly; in order to the excuſing any error, as a weakneſs of the underſtanding, or as a ſin of ignorance, and rendering it conſiſtent with a good conſcience, it is required, that it be rather taken up involuntarily, and thro' ſome diſadvantage or other in our circumſtances, which we could not well remedy, than through groſs careleſsneſs, and a wilful neglect or refuſal to uſe thoſe means of conviction, which God hath afforded us. There is a great deal of difference as to the criminalneſs of falſe perſuaſions upon this account; the ſame error which one perſon may hold very pardonably, (as being, without much fault of his own, either thro' weakneſs of parts, or prejudice from education, or want of opportunity of knowing better, unavoidably, in a manner, led into it: I ſay, that very ſame error) may be extremely dangerous in other perſons that have better parts, and have had a better education, and enjoy more opportunities of informing themſelves right in thoſe points; ſo eſpecially if there be any ſecret taint of pride, or luſt, or peeviſhneſs, or ambition or covetouſneſs, or the like, that doth influence their underſtandings, and keep them from coming to the knowledge of the truth. But I have not time to dwell upon this.

In the ſecond place, (to come to another head of things, which are conſiſtent with a good conſcience) as we ſay, all errors of the underſtanding, which proceed from human weakneſs, do not violate a good conſcience; ſo we ſay, in the ſecond place, that neither are any ſins in our practice, which may be truly called ſins of infirmity, inconſiſtent with it.

It is not required to a man's having a good conſcience, that he ſhould keep the commandments of God

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in all inſtances, that he ſhould always, in all points, live up to his duty, and never be guilty of any tranſgreſſion which he knows to be ſuch: No, the conditions of the goſpel covenant made by Chriſt Jeſus with mankind for their ſalvation, were never deſigned to be ſo hard, nor is there any colour throughout the new teſtament for ſuch a ſevere aſſertion: Nor indeed is it perhaps poſſible for any man thus to live; or, if any man do, he is extraordinary; tho', in truth, I believe that man is ſcarce to be found that doth conceit of himſelf, in cold blood, that he doth thus live: On the contrary, the more pious, and virtuous, and devout any man is, generally the more ſenſible he is of many irregularities, and ſlips, and miſcarriages in his life. This is certain, that any ſin may ſtand with a good conſcience, that will ſtand with a man's hearty and ſincere reſolutions, and conſtant endeavours to live honeſtly in all things: And therefore, tho' a man may be conſcious to himſelf of abundance of frailties, and infirmities, and imperfections in his life, and thoſe both in his inward deſires, and appetites, and affections, and in his outward words and actions; yet ſo long as he can, upon good grounds, ſatisfy himſelf that he doth honeſtly endeavour, in the main and general courſe of his life to ſerve God, and to mortify his luſts, and to do his duty in all reſpects, and heartily prays and labours to grow better; his frailties, of what nature ſoever they be, will never be imputed to him in the other world; but will be waſhed away by the blood of Chriſt, thro' an habitual repentance, tho' he ſhould never live perfectly to conquer thoſe infirmities.

But, thirdly and laſtly; let me add one propoſition more upon this point, and I ſhall conclude it. As

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ſins of ignorance, and ſins of infirmity, are reconcileable with a good conſcience; ſo likewiſe are all paſſed ſins of what kind ſoever, whether actual or habitual, reconcileable with it, ſuppoſing we have ſincerely repented of them. It is not required, in order to the having a good conſcience, that a man ſhould all his life have been innocent, or at leaſt have been only attended with the common frailties of human nature: No; God hath no-where made this the condition of our ſalvation. That which Chriſt hath required of us, is, not that a man ſhould have been always virtuous, but, if he hath been vicious, that he ſhould be penitent. This, I am ſure, is the tenor of the goſpel-covenant. All men whatſoever, let them have been never ſo great ſinners, let their offences have been multiplied to never ſo great a number, and heightened with never ſo aggravating circumſtances, yet, if they truly repent of them, if they come to God with hearty contrition for what is paſſed, and ſincere reſolutions and endeavours to become better for the time to come; all theſe men, I ſay, are objects of the mercies of the goſpel; and our Lord hath promiſed to receive them, and own them for his diſciples, and to reward them as ſuch.

St. *Paul* himſelf was in the number of thoſe men that we are ſpeaking of; he had been a bitter perſecutor of Chriſt's religion, and he confeſſeth of himſelf that he was the greateſt of ſinners: But yet this very man, as bad as he thought himſelf to have been, after he had repented of his ſins, and become a ſincere diſciple of Chriſt, doubted not to ſay of himſelf, notwithſtanding all his former iniquities, *We truſt we have a good conſcience*, &c.

Having thus given an account of what things are conſiſtent with a good conſcience, which was the firſt thing

thing I was to do; I now come to the other, that is, to ſhew what things are inconſiſtent with it. And here the general propoſition is, that whatever is irreconcileable with a man's hearty endeavouring in all things to live honeſtly, all that is irreconcileable with a good conſcience. Now, there are two things, which every one, at the firſt hearing of them, will be convinced are required, in order to any man's being willing to live honeſtly in all things.

Firſt; that he be very ſincere in his purpoſes, and deſires, and endeavours. And,

Secondly; that thoſe purpoſes, and deſires, and endeavours do extend to all inſtances of his duty.

Now, oppoſite to this ſincerity and univerſality of endeavour, are all ſorts of hypocriſy on one hand; and all partial obedience to God's Laws on the other: Neither of which therefore can conſiſt with a good conſcience. It is a needleſs thing to go about nicely and laborioufly to give an account what it is to be ſincere or hypocritical in our deſires and endeavours, and what it is to be impartial or partial in them; for every man doth readily underſtand thoſe things: He muſt either want natural parts, or be extremely under the power of melancholy, that is not a competent judge of his own ſincerity or inſincerity, ſo that he doth not very well know when he lays out his faithful and hearty endeavours to do his duty in all inſtances, and when only in a few.

Inſtead therefore of a ſtrict proſecution of this argument, I think it better to treat of it in a popular way; that is to ſay, for the aſſiſting every one of you to apply theſe generals to your own particular caſes. I ſhall ſet before you ſome of the moſt common and uſual

ſtates and conditions of men among us, which may plainly be convinced either of ſincerity or partiality, and conſequently are irreconcileable with a good conſcience.

And, firſt of all; as for all atheiſtical, profane, lewd, debauched perſons, that have little ſenſe of religion or honeſty, but live in this world, as if they neither feared God, or regarded men, the whole buſineſs and deſign of whoſe lives is the ſatisfaction of their covetous or ambitious deſires, or the gratification of their brutiſh appetites, for the attaining of which they ſtick at nothing: As to theſe men, I ſay, it is a needleſs thing to aſk whether they have a good conſcience; for it is rather a queſtion whether they have any conſcience at all; whether they have not ſinned themſelves beyond all the apprehenſions and diſcriminations of what is good, and what is evil? And therefore, if this kind of men do live at peace within themſelves, if they be ſeldom or never haunted with troubleſome and vexatious reflections upon their own courſe of life, this is no argument in the world that they have a good conſcience; but rather that God hath wholly forſaken them and given them up to hardneſs of heart, and a reprobate mind, which, of all conditions on this ſide damnation, is the moſt dreadful.

But, ſecondly; what ſhall we ſay of the negligent and careleſs ſort of men, ſuch as are not indeed openly wicked, or profane, or impious, nor are they guilty of any ſuch enormous ſcandalous crimes, as either blemiſh their reputations in the world, or render them obnoxious to human laws; but in the mean time they live in an habitual careleſſneſs, as to all that concerns their ſouls, or the other world: They have no ſenſe of

God or religion upon their minds; tho' perhaps they may make a practice of coming to church as other chriſtians do, yet they hardly know what it is either there, or in their cloſets, heartily and fervently to ſay their prayers: They know not what it is to bewail their ſins, or ſeriouſly to make reſolutions againſt them, or to ſet themſelves in good earneſt to the rooting out of any vicious inclination that they labour under: But they ſpend their days either in a courſe of pleaſure, or a hurry of worldly cares and buſineſs, or elſe perhaps in a dull, lazy, unthinking way; and the greateſt comfort they can give to themſelves, is, that tho' they do no great good in the world, yet they do no great harm: Can theſe men, with any juſtice, pretend to a good conſcience? No, certainly, they cannot; for they cannot with any colour or reaſon, ſay of themſelves, that they are in all things willing to live honeſtly. If they were, how was it poſſible for them to live in a groſs wilful neglect of all the duties that do more immediately relate to God, and of all the methods of Chriſt Jeſus, by which a new principle, or holineſs, or regeneration, is to be attained? We are to know, that ſins of omiſſion, if they be habitual and cuſtomary, and in ſuch things without which an holy chriſtian life cannot be maintained; I ſay, ſuch omiſſions as theſe are as certainly damnable, as a courſe of vicious and wicked actions.

But, thirdly; what ſhall we ſay of another ſort of men, that ſeem to be religious, but are not inwardly ſo; that make a ſhew of piety in their converſation, but it is only for the ſerving ſome private turn? Can any of theſe men plead a title to a good conſcience? Oh, no; they are the fartheſt from it that it is poſſible. Not but I think it much better and more tolerable to

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have the form of godlineſs, tho' without the power of it, than to be without both power and form too: Yet, certainly, let the form and appearances that thoſe men make, be never ſo fair and ſpecious, yet if their minds be of a different complexion from the outward behaviour; if impurity and wickedneſs be lodged under a viſor of piety; if their good actions be done to be ſeen of men, that ſo they may advance their reputation and intereſt in the world; if any private ends be carried on of covetouſneſs, or luſt, or worldly greatneſs, for the accompliſhing of which all this ſhew of religion is intended; theſe are the verieſt hypocrites in the world, and, of all ſorts of hypocrites, are the moſt odious to God: For theſe are the painted ſepulchres our Saviour ſpeaks of, which appear glorious without, but inwardly are full of rottenneſs, and dead mens bones: Theſe are thoſe that, as he ſaith, do juſtify themſelves before men; but God knoweth their hearts; and that which is highly eſteemed of in thoſe men by all that ſee them, is abominable in the ſight of God.

But, fourthly; there are another ſort of men, that are no ways guilty of that hypocriſy I have been now proving; but, as far as their religion goes, it is very ſincere: They have abundance of good deſires and purpoſes; and when upon any occaſion, they are brought to examine the ſtate of their own minds and conſciences, they are extremely troubled to find that they have made no great progreſs in virtue, but are under the tyranny of ſo many evil habits: Their hearts are really affected with the ſenſe of religion; and when, at the ſtated ſeaſons of the year, they repair with other chriſtians, to the holy communion, they do it with great devotion, and they are full of good purpoſes and

reſolutions to mend their ways. But yet all this religion of theirs is not of force and ſtrength enough to conquer any one of their evil habits, any one of thoſe reigning luſts, which enthral them, and lead them captive at will and pleaſure. They often wiſh they were good, and deſire not only to die the death. but alſo to live the life, of the righteous: But ſtill this wiſh or deſire never proceeds farther than a bare purpoſe of ſetting themſelves ſome time or other, to be what they wiſh to be; for ſtill they continue as bad as they were, whatever the prevailing ſins of their life be, whether a courſe of profane ſwearing, or irreligious talking; a courſe of drunkenneſs or revelling; a courſe of gaming, or keeping idle company, to the neglect of their callings and family; a courſe of lewdneſs, and unlawful love; a courſe of indirect dealings in their calling; a courſe of uncharitable cenſuring and railing, and ſlandering, and backbiting; I ſay, of what nature or kind ſoever their evil habits and cuſtoms are, they do not quit any of them for all their good deſires, and good reſolutions.

This, God knows, is the caſe of too many that profeſs chriſtianity among us: What now ſhall we ſay to theſe? Can theſe men be ſaid to have a good conſcience upon account of their many good wiſhes, and deſires, and purpoſes? No, I dare not ſay they have: If indeed they grow better upon theſe their wiſhes and purpoſes, tho' they did not on a ſudden become ſo holy and virtuous as they ought to be; yet I would ſay, they were in a way to a good conſcience, becauſe they had done ſomething towards a reformation, and might, by the grace of God, go farther. But when they have nothing but conviction upon their minds that they ought

to

to live better, and now and then a good wiſh that they did ſo; but yet, for all that, they do not amend, but run on in the old road, whenever a temptation preſents itſelf, they can be no more entitled to the name of a good conſcience, than they can be entitled to the name of ſober, temperate, chaſte, diligent, ſerious, upright, regular men, when yet they are not ſo indeed, but only deſire ſo to be. If they were heartily and ſincerely willing in all things to live honeſtly, which is Saint *Paul*'s meaſure of a good conſcience, they would certainly live ſo. That will is not a ſincere will that doth not obtain its effect in all thoſe matters which are ſo plainly in our power as theſe are, that we are now ſpeaking of. If they were indeed deſirous to approve themſelves to God, they would ſtrive againſt thoſe ſins which hold them in captivity; they would every day fortify their reſolutions; they would as much as they could, avoid the temptations; they would uſe twenty methods to keep themſelves out of the ſnare, or to break thro' it, which every prudent man could readily ſuggeſt to himſelf. All this they would do, if they were in good earneſt in this matter: And if they did this, they would, in a little time, be certainly maſters of their own deſires, and live as they ought to do: But in the mean time, ſo long as they live as they do, they muſt not flatter themſelves with a conceit that they have a good conſcience; for no courſe of open wilful ſin (as all the ſins I have been now inſiſting on are ſuch) can be reconciled to a good conſcience. It is in this ſenſe that St. *James* ſpeaks, when he tells us, That *he that breaketh one of God's commandments is guilty of all:* And St. *John*, *whoſoever committeth ſin is of the devil; and no one that is born of God can commit ſin;*

And, lastly, that our Saviour speaks, when he cries out, *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command you.*

But to leave this head, and go on; for I would willingly, upon this occasion, take notice of all the common artifices and deceits wherewith men are apt to impose upon themselves in this business of a good conscience:

In the fifth place; there are a sort of men that value themselves upon their moral honesty and justice in their dealings between man and man. They have not, indeed, as they confess of themselves, been so careful, and regular, and devout in their lives, as they should have been; but yet, they thank God, they have a good conscience; they have wronged no man; they are in charity with all the world; they pay every body their own; and what they have, they are come honestly and fairly by.

Thus, indeed, in common language, hath justice between man and man engrossed to itself the name of a good conscience; and it is chiefly oppressors and extortioners, covetous and griping men, knaves and cheats, that we reproach with the name of unconscionable men, or men of no conscience. Thus far indeed is true, that upright dealing between man and man, in all our conversation, especially where mercy and charity have been joined with that dealing, doth make a fair step towards a good conscience; and, on the contrary, all kind of injustice, and extortion, and oppression or cruelty, are certain signs or instances of an evil conscience, or no conscience; and on such persons God will have no mercy: But then it is always to be remembered, that just dealing with man is *part* of our duty, and not the *whole*; nay, besides

that, at the ſame time that we are juſt and fair in our negotiations with men, we may at the ſame time, I ſay, be horribly unjuſt to God, and ourſelves alſo. So that, unleſs a man can think that his fair uſage of his neighbour in the courſe of his trade, will make atonement and compenſation for the ill uſage of God, and of himſelf, in all the reſt of his converſation, by profaneneſs, irreligion, drunkenneſs, luxury, and the like, he cannot, upon this ſingle account of moral honeſty, as they call it, ſatisfy himſelf that he hath a good conſcience. He that will entitle himſelf to that muſt (as we have often ſaid) endeavour in all things to live honeſtly, which ſuch a man as this doth not.

But, ſixthly, and laſtly; there is another notion of a good conſcience, which too commonly paſſeth among ſome of us, which is different from all theſe I have named, and it is this; mens ſatisfying themſelves with their being heartily zealous about ſome outward forms or modes of religion, which, either upon choice or chance they have pitched upon as the beſt, and making their zeal for theſe things to be true marks of their ſincere piety. Thus, for inſtance, ſome among us think themſelves chriſtians, merely for being members of our church, and heartily complying with its conſtitutions, and ſhewing a great zeal againſt all thoſe that are of a different communion from us (whether papiſts or ſectaries.) Others are as much ſatisfied of their title to God's favour, merely upon account of their oppoſing our conſtitution, and joining themſelves to ſome godly party that are againſt all human inventions in the worſhip of God, (by which name they are pleaſed to call that way of worſhip which is eſtabliſhed among us:) With theſe men it is a main evidence of their being ſincerely

cerely religious, to make ſcruples and difficulties in ſuch plain things where another man would make none. A form, or a ceremony, or a geſture, tho' never ſo ancient in the church, never ſo decent or innocent in itſelf, gives them as great a ſhock, and raiſeth as great an outcry, as if chriſtianity itſelf was in danger; and, upon account of this their unreaſonable niceneſs and ſcrupuloſity, they would appropriate to themſelves the name of tender conſciences; which indeed is the higheſt inſtance of a good conſcience.

As to the firſt of theſe I mentioned, thoſe that do ſincerely embrace Chriſt's religion, and the worſhip of God in the way that it is held forth and eſtabliſhed in the church of England, I deſire leave to ſay this to them; that tho' I do in my conſcience believe that there is no church in the world wherein the religion of Chriſt is more purely taught, or his ſacraments more duly adminiſtred, than in this church, and conſequently in the communion of which a man may more ſafely venture his everlaſting ſalvation; yet let them not deceive themſelves, neither the goſpel of Chriſt, nor the doctrines of his church, do give them any hopes of happineſs hereafter, unleſs, to their holy profeſſion, they add an holy life and converſation.

And as for the tender-conſcienced men I mentioned in the ſecond place, (be they of what ſect, or perſuaſion, or denomination ſoever they pleaſe) nay, tho' they be arrived to that tenderneſs of conſcience, that they ſcruple as much the uſe of civil ceremonies, as the reſt of them do religious; and are come to refine upon *thou* and *you*, *yea* and *yes*, the reſpect of the *hat*, and twenty other ſuch things, which they make ſerious matters of conſcience of; as to theſe, I

ſay,

ſay, that tho' I meddle not with their opinions and perſuaſions, (which I leave to God, the ſearcher of all hearts, to judge how far they are innocently or invincibly taken up, and how far they ſhall anſwer for them as taken up by their own fault); yet let them not preſume that this tenderneſs of conſcience of theirs, as they call it, is any argument in the world of a good conſcience, unleſs they can ſatisfy themſelves that they are as tender-conſcienced in all the other parts and inſtances of their duty, (which they are convinced, both in nature and revelation, to be their duty) as they are in ſuch things which they lay ſo great a ſtreſs upon. Let them therefore aſk themſelves theſe queſtions: Are they as careful about all the ſubſtantial parts of God's worſhip, as they are in ſuch circumſtantials? Do they make a conſcience of being juſt in all their dealings; of being innocent in all their converſation; of being peaceable among their neighbours; of living without offence to the government that protects them? Are they kind and candid to all them that differ in opinion from them, and avoid all uncharitableneſs in cenſuring and condemning others that are not of their perſuaſion? In a word, ; Do they in all their converſation exerciſe themſelves to have a conſcience void of offence towards God, and towards man? Theſe indeed are true ſigns of a good and tender conſcience: But for men to be wonderfully tender in their conſciences about the outworks, as I may call them, of religion, and yet not to be equally tender in other matters, wherein the very life and ſoul of it doth conſiſt; this is no argument in the world of a good conſcience, but rather an evidence to the contrary.

To conclude the whole matter: The ſum of all is this; That no man, of what perſuaſion or religion ſoever, can, with any good grounds, hope to appear with a good conſcience before God in the next life, or reap the ſolid comfort of it in this, but only ſuch a one as can truly ſatisfy himſelf, that he is moſt heartily willing, and doth ſincerely endeavour in all things to live honeſtly: Whatever is ſhort of this, is ſhort of a good conſcience; and whoever makes this good, may truly, and with great comfort to himſelf, notwithſtanding all his other frailties and infirmities, ſay with St. Paul in the text, *I truſt I have a good conſcience.*

Which that we may all have, God, of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

END of the THIRD VOLUME.